Lydia

“Come and stay at my home.” These weren’t Lydia’s first words to the Apostle Paul. Much conversation had already happened. Deep conversation. The kind of conversation that comes from listening eagerly to one another with open hearts and minds. The kind of conversation that opens the way to faith and leads to conversion.

Lydia and Paul first met outside the gates of Philippi, a city in Macedonia, now part of modern Greece. Lydia lived and worked in Philippi, dealing in textiles colored with the purple dye for which the region was famous. Her wealth allowed her to live independently in a spacious house. She was also a religious seeker. Though she was a Gentile by birth, Lydia worshipped the God of the Jews. When Paul saw her, she was with a group of devout women who gathered to pray at a place by the river just outside the city.

Paul was in Philippi on a mission. Literally. After frustrating attempts to preach Christ in Asia Minor, he heard the call in a dream to come over to Macedonia. He met with great success there and founded congregations in several cities, beginning in Philippi. And Lydia was the first in that community to believe in Jesus Christ, the first Christian convert on the European continent.

As a newly baptized Christian, Lydia extended the invitation to Paul and Silas and other co-workers to come and stay at her home. Having a place to stay freed them to preach and minister without working at other jobs. Lydia’s home became the place where the congregation that developed in Philippi gathered for worship and fellowship.

We tell this story because it expands our understanding of the financial role women played as the earliest Christian congregations were forming. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and other women gave from their resources to support Jesus and the disciples in their ministry. Tabitha and many other women contributed financially to care for the poor. Lydia offered hospitality. While hospitality is a common role for women, the extent of Lydia’s generosity is remarkable. Her self-giving care for her new community was patterned after the self-giving love of Jesus. It is also remarkable that this woman had a home of her own to share. A large house. A major asset. Because she made creative use of her assets, she was able to provide more substantial help for the cause she believed in than she ever could have done by giving from her income alone.

Lydia can inspire us to think in fresh ways about our own assets: property, investments, insurance, art. Women control massive assets today. How could these resources, these blessings, be leveraged to help you make the change you want to see in the world? Like Lydia, you can use assets creatively right now without losing the security you depend upon. Most of us will probably make our greatest gifts through the provisions we make in our wills and trusts. You have the power to direct those assets in ways that express your love and that give substance to your deepest hopes for the world. Your relationship with Christ helped shaped those hopes and empowers you to act for their realization. That is what it means to be in Christ.