

The Rev. Dennis J. Reid
 The Sixth Sunday of Easter | Year C | John 14:23-29; Acts 16:9-15
 St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Sinking Spring, PA
 May 26th 2019

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Even well before my wife and I were married, we were grateful to find out from one another that we had pretty much the same thoughts on kids. We both wanted kids; we both had good experiences growing up with siblings; we both knew that, eventually, we felt called to be parents.

That was the easy part. The much tougher part was settling on names.

After quickly dismissing some of the early possibilities -- it was never going to be Dennis the Third -- we realized it probably had to be a biblical name: not just because we're both priests, but because we wanted the name to have a good story, to remind us of how God moved through our lives and the lives of the saints, and naming a baby after a biblical person seemed to be a decent place to start. We went looking for a story that meant something to us, or a person we both looked up to. For the longest time, when Megan was actually pregnant, we called the baby "Balthazar" as a silly stand in name after one of the names of the Magi -- but, you *could* do a lot worse story-wise than a wise man bringing gifts and worshiping the baby Jesus.

But when she was finally born, we were ready with real names. And when I saw she was a girl, and my heart was moved in such a way I didn't know was possible until then, the name was perfect: Lydia.

In the end, it was a matter of the heart the whole time. There really aren't that many girl's names in the Bible anyway, but as we read over Lydia's story in Acts, we knew we had the right one. She was a businesswoman; she must have been independent and outgoing to have had her own business selling purple cloth, the color of royalty that would've been quite expensive. As the story goes, she was a worshiper of God, and as Paul makes his way through Philippi, Lydia becomes the first convert in Europe, with her whole household being baptized. All of that would have been plenty to make a good story, but there was one line that stood out for Lydia's relationship with God: "The Lord opened her heart."

I think about that all the time now. And I do mean it when I say I didn't know what my heart was capable of. I'm sure many parents know that kind of feeling, but you certainly don't need to be a parent to have had your heart so moved, so changed, or so loved that you've been surprised by joy and by God's presence. I wonder if that was the original Lydia's story -- that maybe she was just minding her own business, going through the ins and outs of her normal life when everything changed for her, that she could have been overwhelmed by hearing the word of God and Paul's preaching, and then empowered by the Spirit in baptism to prevail upon those around her by her good works. She may not have known what she was capable of, either -- even in all her success in the business world, God did something new through her by pouring love into her heart.

What especially gives me hope in her story is that she was already someone who believed in God, and God *still* did something new through her. Lydia's story gives me great hope for the Church now, because we who have also already believed in God can be as moved as she was, to do something new like she did, to pray that our hearts might be opened to new possibilities and new directions in our lives.

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Since becoming a father, I have realized that I'm much more attuned to my own heart -- probably because my heart is now

running around our house and climbing stairs and singing songs and saying her ABCs. Every day, there seems to be a larger sense of what my heart hopes for, or when it is overwhelmed by the sweetness of this life, and yes, when it is carrying worry and fear. But it isn't just at home that I've known these things: I've also come to know it here and among you -- like when so many of you ask how you can help Fr. Jeffrey; when you care for one another; when you work alongside each other; when you laugh and cry with one another; when you pray and sing together. Our hearts and our love are connected in community, and as we've heard in John's gospel, almost every time Jesus mentions love, he does so to a group, in the plural, because love requires relationship, love is only present when we are sharing it as a gift, love moves us to a greater sense of what is possible in our lives and in the lives of those we love.

It is a gift God has shared with us -- we know that love best in the life of Christ Jesus, and we hear his words today reminding us that for our hearts to know that love, for our hearts to be opened again and again to his love, we must do all we can not to allow them to become troubled. Our hearts are not meant for fear -- fear feels so strange to us and so foreign to us because our very hearts don't know how to comprehend it; our hearts are meant for love, and perfect love casts out all fear.

I believe almost everything we do is a matter of our hearts -- so I invite you to consider the status of your heart today -- what does it yearn for? How has God moved your heart as he did for Lydia? If it is open, what gifts of love are waiting to be given by you? If your heart is carrying a troubled spirit, who or what might it become more open to? How might God surprise you with a change in your heart?

If there's one thing these days I'm learning over and over again, from watching Lydia, from reading the stories of the saints, and from hearing the words of scripture today, it's the importance of an open heart -- a heart ready and willing to be moved, changed, and renewed by the gift of love and peace that passes all understanding.

May the Lord open our hearts as he did for Lydia that we might hear the truth of God's word anew.

May the Lord pour his peace into our hearts that we might know true peace and not how the world gives.

May the Lord calm our hearts that we might be courageous and vulnerable enough to offer our love to the world through them.

And may the Lord give to you a love that comes from the heart of God -- a love that binds us together with him, a love that will not leave us comfortless, a love that spurs us into action, a love that compels us to live without fear and with open hearts lifted up to the Lord.

Amen.