

What the world needs now is love sweet love. It's the only thing that there's just too little of. What the world needs now is love sweet love. No, not just for some but for everyone. (1965 popular song with lyrics by [Hal David](#) and music composed by [Burt Bacharach](#). First recorded and made popular by [Jackie DeShannon](#))

It has been a volatile week in our country, as we watched with disbelief the vile hatred of white supremacists in Charlottesville and with fear the dramatic reaction of those determined to stand against it, and with dismay the inability of our President to bring peace to a situation that needed a measured moral response of carefully chosen words. On top of that we watched news from Barcelona's attack by ISIS. Maya Angelou once said, "Hate has caused a lot of problems in this world, but it has not solved one yet." The Hip-Hop group, Black-Eyed Peas said,

*People killin', people dyin'
Children hurt and you hear them cryin'
Can you practice what you preach?
Or would you turn the other cheek?
Father, Father, Father help us
Send some guidance from above
'Cause people got me, got me questionin'
Where is the love... where is the love? Where is the love, the love, the love?*

The Gospel of Jesus Christ would have never spread, if the Apostle Paul and the early follower Lydia had not been careful with their words and actions, clear about where the love of God is. Paul was a powerful speaker in his day, and Lydia was a successful and wealthy business woman. They were both open-minded careful in relating to each other. Being attentive to the Holy Spirit of God, means that you listen carefully to the people around you and you respond appropriately to them, even if they are different from you. Paul, Timothy, and Silas were traveling from town to town, having parted ways with Barnabas and John Mark who went

to Cyprus. They knew very little about the people of Macedonia. Travel was difficult. There was no predicting how people would react. They might be turned away, scoffed at, or thrown in prison. In fact, right after this encounter with Lydia, they were thrown in prison. There they sang and pray until their chains fell off, and the fearful prison guard and his household all converted. There is always love, not hate for human beings when the Spirit of Jesus Christ is present. There is always openness of heart and home where God's love is found. Where is the love? Here is the love. Hear this story of Holy Scripture in the book of the Acts of the Apostles:

Acts 16:4-15

As they went from town to town, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily. ⁶ They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; ⁸ so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. ¹¹ We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. ¹³ On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us. (NRS)

At a time when women were subjugated to their fathers or husbands or the masters of a household in which they lived a maid, mistress, or servant or some kind, Lydia was a boss! She was the head of her household and she was not afraid of a group of traveling preachers. We do not know why she had managed such a position of power in her culture, except that she was a dealer in purple or indigo cloth, and that was very valuable commodity.

Let me tell you just how valuable. According to Scottish scholar, William Barclay in the 1950's "The purple dye had to be gathered from a certain shell-fish and was so costly that to dye a pound of wool [would cost] the equivalent of 150 British pounds." Now 150 British pounds inflated to 2017 is about 4000 pounds and translated to dollars is more than \$5000. That's why purple was the color reserved for Royalty.

We have no other information about Lydia than what we have read today and the single verse that says Paul and the others went back to Lydia's after they got out of prison. Sadly that is often the case with women in the Bible, because of the patriarchy that ruled the day. But what we do see here is that Lydia was chosen by God, through the openness of heart that God gave her, to hear the Gospel. She saw the love. As the influential head of her household, Lydia led all around her to be baptized. We live with a sense of individualism, and individual family units. When we think of household, we imagine a nuclear family of parents and children, but for Lydia, a household could have been very large, as it may have included extended family and everyone who worked for her, and their families. Such is the communal understanding of life in Biblical times. Now Lydia was already a worshipper of God, which means she had heard of the God of Israel, and she was among those Gentiles who held God in high regard. She was a spiritual person but now she is learning about the love of God seen in Jesus the Messiah. She is hearing Paul's words about how the resurrection of Christ has triumph over sin and death. She is learning about the Gospel that liberates people by grace,

and fills them with hope and a new commitment to love God and neighbor. As Paul said to the Galatians, chapter 3 - there is no longer male or female, slave or free, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

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It is this same Gospel that has been passed on to us. We know of God's love in Jesus Christ, that transcends all hatred. We know of God's love in Jesus Christ that overcomes all evil -- ultimately. So what is an appropriate response to all the vile behavior we see in the world? We can bemoan the lack of love, and feel helpless and hopeless. Or we can trust that the faith, love, peace of a mustard seed will grow and make a difference. Peace Presbyterian: Our mission is to make God known by growing as disciples of Jesus Christ, building a community of peace, and caring for the needs of others. A church with that mission will not stop looking for ways to spread God's love. We will keep bagging food at Beth-El, we will keep reading to at-risk children, and provide them a good day of hope to start school. Today you heard about the ministry of Steve Miller as guardian ad litem for at-risk kids.

We will keep finding ways to spread love not hatred. We will keep having hard discussions about race, healthcare, poverty, mental illness, peacemaking, and many other things because we choose to trust one another enough to have those discussions respectfully, believing that unity in diversity is a choice we make and a skill we develop.

We will keep studying scripture and praying together, whether we are 7 or 77, because we believe growth in Christian discipleship is critical. How can we call ourselves Christian, if we do not really know the life of Jesus Christ? A church named Peace, with our mission, will not be reactionary or disrespectful in person or in social media, because we respect one another, and all humanity. We may be called by our faith to speak up or to post online but we will speak the truth in love and engage in healthy debate about important issues, without being condescending. And as my college roommate Alice Micklem, a social worker in Charlottesville, said after quoting Elie Wiesel and MLK, "effective meaningful responses (to unmasked and unbridled hatred) must be rooted in love. I do not want my

heart or actions to mirror the hatred and violence that I find so abhorrent.” But we also do not want to be silent in the face of evil, or unwilling to confess our complicity in it.

Some of us come to worship, hoping for an escape from all the divisiveness of the world, and as pastor to all of you, I will always try to avoid dangerous rhetoric and will support respectful conversation about any issues that divide us. I truly appreciate it when you let me know if you believe I have crossed some partisan line. We cannot escape the issues themselves, because they relate to what it means to be human and in relationship to other people. It is our calling as Christians to preserve human dignity.

Our baptism is a sign of our commitment to live like Christ, or in the case of parents baptizing children, a promise to teach them to live like Christ until they can make that promise themselves. Jesus challenged those who thought they were super-religious living according to all God’s rules. Jesus challenged those who were rich, for not being willing to give up their possessions to care for the poor. Jesus challenged those who too quickly judged others, without considering their own faults. Jesus challenged his own followers for not getting the message of God’s love right. Jesus laid down his life for others, and calls us to be willing to do the same.

Why do you think Lydia’s story was remembered and recorded and not the stories of the other women? Here’s what I think: I think Lydia’s Christian conversion actually made its way into the Holy Scriptures because with her wealth and leadership ability, she became a great supporter of the early church. I expect there were other women who became Christians at the same time as Lydia, but Lydia’s name and story were remembered, because she was the first European convert to Christianity and with her financial success, she was able to bless many others, even beyond her household. A Gospel of love spread through Lydia sharing her time, talent, and treasure. I hope you’ll be like Lydia, keeping your listening heart open to strangers who come into your town with a message of love and using whatever resources you have to change this world by spreading

the love of Christ. What the world needs now is love, sweet love. Hatred may seem to temporarily eclipse the light of Jesus Christ, but just wait a couple of hours and the sun will be shining brightly again, thanks to people like Lydia.