

*John 12:20-26*

<sup>20</sup>Some Greeks were among those who had come up to worship at the festival.

<sup>21</sup>They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and made a request: “Sir, we want to see Jesus.” <sup>22</sup>Philip told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

<sup>23</sup>Jesus replied, “The time has come for the Human One to be glorified. <sup>24</sup>I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup>Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever. <sup>26</sup>Whoever serves me must follow me. Wherever I am, there my servant will also be. My Father will honor whoever serves me.

*Acts 16:11–15 (CEB)*

<sup>11</sup>We sailed from Troas straight for Samothrace and came to Neapolis the following day. <sup>12</sup>From there we went to Philippi, a city of Macedonia’s first district and a Roman colony. We stayed in that city several days. <sup>13</sup>On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the riverbank, where we thought there might be a place for prayer. We sat down and began to talk with the women who had gathered. <sup>14</sup>One of those women was Lydia, a Gentile God-worshipper from the city of Thyatira, a dealer in purple cloth. As she listened, the Lord enabled her to embrace Paul’s message. <sup>15</sup>Once she and her household were baptized, she urged, “Now that you have decided that I am a believer in the Lord, come and stay in my house.” And she persuaded us.

*God brought us to him because there is work to be done . . . come and see!*

In the Gospels and in Acts, we meet Jews, Gentiles, and . . . God-fearers. The Jews, of course, are those who worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and keep God’s law, given to Moses at Mt. Sinai more than a millennium before. “Gentiles” is the Jewish term for anyone who wasn’t a Jew. “Pagans” is a pretty-good synonym and “Greeks” was also used in a general way to refer to those who were not Jewish.

“God-fearers” (or sometimes “God-worshippers”) was a term used to denote Gentiles who found themselves drawn to the sacred scrolls of the Jews and their God. These God-fearers would read the scrolls and even pray to the God they met there. They would sometimes travel to Jerusalem to learn more. But . . . they would not convert. Conversion would require circumcision of the men, a significant barrier.

Both of this week’s Scripture passages feature God-fearers, some who have to come to Jerusalem looking for Jesus and a woman from Thyatira whom Paul would baptize on his second missionary journey.

*Andrew is still at it*

In the past couple of weeks, we’ve seen that Andrew is a practical doer – he wants to move things forward, to get the job done. In the story from John 12, we see Andrew at it again. This time, some God-fearers have come to Jerusalem to worship God as best they can. Evidently, they have heard of Jesus and intend to seek him out. So they come to Philip, one of Jesus’ first followers. Interestingly, Philip doesn’t just take them to Jesus, instead he seeks out Andrew and informs him of the request. Andrew, being that action-oriented doer, takes Philip and, presumably the God-fearers, to Jesus.

I say, presumably, because Jesus doesn’t respond directly to the request or to the God-fearers themselves. Instead, the request of these Gentiles seems to trigger in Jesus a crisis. Jesus has already made his entrance into Jerusalem and the Jewish leaders have turned violently against him. Now the arrival of these Gentiles turns Jesus to what lies shortly ahead, confrontation and death.

There is no reason to think that Andrew comprehended any more than did his fellow disciples about what lay ahead. But even at this late hour, Andrew did what he had always done: bring people to Jesus . . . come and see.

*Lydia – one who saw and believed*

Philippi is in Greece, but in the first century it was no typical Greek town. Having about 10,000 inhabitants, Philippi was on the Via Ignatia, the major highway connecting Asia Minor and the Adriatic Sea. Philippi had the status of a Roman colony – its inhabitants were Roman citizens, with all the attendant privileges. City inscriptions were in Latin, not Greek. City government was modeled on Rome, not Athens. Philippi was very “Latinized.”

The apostle Paul first came to Philippi in about AD 50. The story of his time there is told in Acts 16:16-40. Luke tells us the story of a devout and wealthy woman, Lydia, from Thyatira, a city northeast of Ephesus. She and other women would meet at a river bank near a city gate each Saturday (the Jewish Sabbath). Luke tells us that she was a “Gentile God-worshiper”), aka a God-fearer. There, on an otherwise ordinary day, she met Paul. Luke writes, “the Lord opened her heart.” She had a special moment and responded by eagerly listening to everything Paul had to say. Subsequently, she and her household were baptized into the Christian community.

*Changing hearts and minds*

It is always important for us to remember that we don’t change hearts and minds. That is God’s work, just as it was with Lydia. But our part is crucial. Lydia heard Paul preach. Andrew had to run and get others – delivering a three-word sermon: “Come and see!!”

It is easy for us to see too much of ourselves in conversion stories, but the changing of hearts and minds is about what *God* is doing to bring all of humanity home. Will Willimon, helps us to see anew the conversion stories in Luke’s writings:

Conversions in Luke-Acts are *stories about beginnings*—the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the church, the initiation of a new mission, as well as the beginning of a new life for the individual person. Conversion is the beginning of the Christian journey, not its final destination. Moreover, conversions in Acts are *stories about vocation*—someone is being called for some godly work. Conversion is not for the smug individual possession of the convert, but rather for the ongoing thrust of the gospel. Finally, conversions in Acts are *stories about the gifts of God*—God is the chief actor in all Lukan accounts of conversion. Even the smallest details are attributed to the working of God. Conversion is not the result of skillful leadership by the community or even of persuasive preaching or biblical interpretation. In many accounts, such as those of Philip’s work with the Ethiopian, the mysterious hand of God directs everything. In other stories, such as the story of Peter and Cornelius, the church must be dragged kicking and screaming into the movements of God. Manipulation, strategic planning, calculating efforts by the community aimed at church growth are utterly absent. Even our much beloved modern notions of “free will” and personal choice and decision appear to play little role in conversion in Acts. Conversion is a surprising, unexpected act of divine grace. “*By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope ...*” (1 Peter 1:3b; author’s italics.)

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. In this brief series, I’ve characterized Andrew as a “practical doer.” Do you agree? In what ways can we all be practical doers? What is it we are doing with this capital campaign? How is part of the vocation God has given us?
2. God’s Holy Spirit enables Lydia to hear and trust Paul’s proclamation of the Good News. Another way to put this would be to say that God’s Spirit began to dwell

within her or that she had been given the Spirit. The Spirit is likewise given to all believers. How is the Spirit's presence within you manifested in your life? How would anyone know?

## Daily Bible Readings

*This week: Bringing all people into the family of God*

**Monday, Isaiah 49:1-6** God and all the nations

**Tuesday, Micah 4** All the nations are to be brought to God's house.

**Wednesday, Luke 4:23-38** Note that Jesus is traced all the way to Adam, not just to Abraham as in Matthew's. Luke's point is that Jesus is savior of *all*.

**Thursday, Romans 4** The story begun with Abraham's faith reaches its culmination in the faith of Christ.

**Friday, Galatians 3:1-9** How hard it was for some Jewish believers to give up their devotion to the works of the Law and supposed ethnic privilege.

**Saturday, Acts 15** The story of the conference called in Jerusalem to address whether Gentile believers had to keep the Law of Moses.

## Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own.

This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

### Monday Evening Class

We have begun our journey through the book of Exodus. This is a great time to join us.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

### Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the story of Esther.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

## Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

**Our current series:** *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: The Kings of Israel*