

Year C Easter 6, 25th May 2025

Acts 16:9-15, Revelation 21:10 & 21:22-22:5, John 5:1-9

Fourth Sunday sermon and conversation

This week, I am offering a short written reflection, and offering people to read it advance of the service, along with the accompanying Bible readings.

I shall run through my reflection in the service, but use the majority of the 'sermon slot' to discuss the readings, with some questions set out below, that I hope will help support reflection and engagement with the readings from Acts and John's gospel.

In our reading from Acts we meet Lydia. Lydia was a 'seller of purple' as the KJV has it, rather than the more specific 'dealer in purple cloth' as the NIV has it. She is a successful business woman, from Thyatira, about 300 miles from where Paul and his group meet her. So, we deduce she is on a business trip of some sort. Purple dye was expensive. Purple cloth would therefore, be expensive. Lydia was selling to the top end niche clientele, the very well off, the elite of society across the region that straddles Asia Minor and Europe. Her heart was opened by God, and she, and the rest of her household (clearly she had servants) following her decision on their behalf, were all baptised! She invited the wandering group of men to stay at her house, at some reputational risk to herself.

Some questions to aid reflection:

- ✝ What risks did Lydia take in becoming a follower of 'the way of Jesus'?
- ✝ What risks, if any, do we take, in following 'the way of Jesus'? Should we take more risks?
- ✝ What do we think Paul said to Lydia that enabled 'the Lord to open her heart' to respond so positively?
- ✝ Paul and his followers went outside the walls of the city and that is where he met Lydia and the other woman gathered there. Where are

our opportunities to meet with people and what might our 'elevator pitch' be to invite people to come and see? To belong, before they believe? Might it not be an 'elevator pitch' at all? If not, then what?

In our reading from John, Jesus asks the man if he wants to be made well. At face value, that seems a curious question. But, when we know the man has been at the pool side of the healing waters for thirty-eight years, we can start to appreciate Jesus' question. Notice that the man doesn't really answer, he dodges it by talking about the process of getting into the pool.

Jesus, as we have come to expect, sees into the man's heart and probably knows him better than the man does himself. Jesus sees someone who is resigned to his condition, has no sense of hope, has become so used to his brokenness that it is part of who he is, and may well quite like that identity. The danger is that it is so familiar to the man that he can't conceive of being anything different; he doesn't know how to be a different person and fears finding out. Encountering the world as a different expression of the self can be daunting; having to slough off the old you for a more genuine and novel expression of the real you, that God loves, is like stepping out for the first time into the world.

Some questions to aid reflection:

- ✝ How do we respond to Jesus' question? Maybe posed slightly differently, as 'Do you want to be made whole?'
- ✝ What aspects of our lives would we wish could be healed?
- ✝ What does Jesus say to you to help you break through a long-term barrier or habit that you are familiar with but would like to change?
- ✝ Do you want Jesus to say to you, 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk'? What is your equivalent of getting up and walking?
- ✝ Does knowing that Jesus and God know you, and love you and look with compassion on you, help at all?