

The Power and Effect of the Resurrection

Text: Acts 16:9–15

Other Lessons: Psalm 67; Revelation 21:9–14, 21–27; John 16:23–33

Sermon Theme: The conversion of Lydia is one of the signs of the power of Christ's resurrection.

Sermon Goal: That hearers are moved by the Spirit and the power of the resurrection to stronger faith and to works that are a sign of that continuing power.

The *Psalm* for today sets the clear missionary tone of this Sunday, praying for God's way to "be known on earth, your saving power among all nations" (Ps 67:2). It calls, "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth" (67:3–4). We have that opportunity today in the story of Lydia's conversion, for Paul and Silas bring the Gospel to her in a place where, to our knowledge, it had not reached before—a new continent. In the *Prayer of the Day*, we pray: "O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them." Peace is knowing that the giver of all good invites us to give him our burdens. We see this prayer answered in Lydia's life and in ours.

This Sunday's text follows last week's reading from Acts 11, in which we learned that the Gentiles are included in the plan of salvation: "When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life'" (Acts 11:18). This is significant, because in today's text the Gospel reaches Europe, a place of Gentiles. Our lesson also comes on the last Sunday before Ascension, which means we are very close to the fortieth day of Easter. So, as the Easter season is coming to a close, our listeners may be getting tired of hearing, "He is risen. He is risen indeed!" The power and effect of the resurrection might be old news. But not so fast! Here is a text that can draw on the effect of the resurrection and anticipate the work of the Holy Spirit.

The *Psalm* (Psalm 67, often referred to as the Missionary Psalm) prays for and then declares God's gracious blessing to his people as they go about their work, so that all the ends of the earth would fear our God. Then the *First Reading* for this Sunday is the report of Paul's Macedonian call and God's blessing on the mission in Philippi. Barred by the Spirit of the Lord from following their original plan to go to Bithynia, Paul, Silas, and Timothy are led to the mission field of the Lord's choosing. Peace is knowing that God is accomplishing *his* perfect plan through us.

The *Second Reading*, from Revelation 21, again gives the Church the vision of the fulfillment of all our prayers, as we see the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God. There is no temple, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are together with the redeemed of all time and place. This is the ultimate and eternal peace for God's people!

Sermon Outline

The Conversion of Lydia Is One of the Signs of the Power of Christ's Resurrection.

- I. The signs tell us that, before hearing the Gospel from Paul, Lydia was a wealthy and faithful woman, but not yet a believer in Christ.
- II. The signs of Lydia's faith and good works tell us that Easter had a powerful effect on her.
- III. The signs in our lives show that Easter has the same power for faith and good works in the Church today.

Sermon

Signs, signs, everywhere signs. "No shirt, no shoes, no service." "Don't walk on the grass." "Do not disturb." There are signs we dislike: "Speed Limit 60," "Limit One Per Customer," "Limited Time

Only.” We dislike them because they limit us. We want life to be without bounds, free, so we dislike signs that limit us.

And then there are signs we long to see. For example, if we or a loved one is sick, we desperately look for a sign of improvement—a sign that things are going to get better. People look for signs in their relationships. “Does she love me? Should I get more serious in this relationship?” Those of you looking for work; you’re looking for a sign too, aren’t you? You’re looking for direction. You are looking for hope.

And what about the signs in our church? For example, how do you know it’s Easter? What are the signs? There’s the aroma of Easter lilies and Easter breakfast. There’s the sound of choirs and the cry, “**He is risen! He is risen indeed!**” There are the sights of Easter dresses and ties and a church that’s full. Maybe you even see people you haven’t seen since Christmas. Then Easter goes. How do you know? The aroma and sound of Easter are no more. Attendance drops. Life returns to that seemingly unending rut.

But wait! Is that all there is? Are we really thinking the effect of Easter has come and gone? Not so today. God’s Word is filled with Easter signs, and today we see them in a woman named Lydia. Let’s use the theme:

The Conversion of Lydia Is One of the Signs of the Power of Christ’s Resurrection.

I.

It’s time to meet Lydia. We read: “And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods” (vv 13–14).

What do we learn here? We get a couple of signs that tell us about this woman, Lydia. We learn that Lydia was from the city of Thyatira. This small city in Asia Minor was a commercial center, especially known for its rich crops and its production of purple dye. Logically enough, then, Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth. Purple cloth was costly and purchased primarily by the nobility. These signs tells us that Lydia was probably a businesswoman of some wealth.

Are these signs of Easter? Certainly not. The color is wrong, and there’s no hint of the resurrection.

But the text also says that Lydia was “a worshiper of God” (v 14). “Worshiper of God” is a term that was often used as a sign for Gentiles who believed in the Jewish God, Yahweh. However, although they believed in God, they were not yet believers in Christ. Is this a sign of Easter? No, but we’re getting closer.

II.

Let’s continue. The text says: “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul” (v 14). We don’t know what Paul said, but he certainly shared the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It would include what we confess in the Creed. It would be a message that Jesus had died on the cross for her and of the victory of Easter and life for all who believe. And through God’s divine work, she paid attention! She heard! Her heart was opened!

But that’s not all! Notice she didn’t waste any time getting baptized along with the members of her household. It was surely a sign. In Lydia’s Baptism, she was united in Christ’s death *and* resurrection (Rom 6:3–5). Faith was there. Salvation was hers.

It didn’t stop there. Faith produced fruit. She begged Paul to allow her to host the missionaries in her home: “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay” (v 15). And the text says, “She prevailed upon us.” Her new faith simply wouldn’t allow her not to express it in works of kindness. Later we even see Paul returning to stay with Lydia—obviously an active member of the church.

What we see in Lydia is just how powerful the message of Easter is— it brings life and salvation! We see the signs! We see an open heart that hears the Word and receives the gifts from Word and Baptism to create faith. Then we see evidence of that faith in good works—the hospitality she offers to Paul and his companions.

God calls. God opens hearts. God creates faith, and God empowers for service. These are the signs of Easter, and these marks are the work of the Holy Spirit as we confess in the catechism: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith” (explanation of the Second Article).

III.

Lydia was a miracle of God’s wondrous love and proof positive that the effects of Easter linger on. But let’s not stop with Lydia. You, too, are a sign, a sign of life, a sign that Easter goes on living, living in hearts and voices.

Maybe right now, though, you don’t feel like much of a sign. Maybe the effect of Easter left you long ago. This would be the work of the devil himself. He aims to steal your victory and lead you to despair. If possible, his goal is to turn your eyes from the empty tomb and turn them inward to yourself and your worldly desires. (*Give specific examples of ways we are discouraged or tempted to forget the Easter victory.*) Is it any wonder that the Church often grows quiet and lifeless nearly forty days after the resurrection? Let it not be so!

Thanks be to God! He is patient and merciful. Christ died and rose for you! God prepares hearts through Confession and Absolution. Forgiveness is received. Hearts are made ready for the proclamation of God’s Word, and the Holy Spirit works in this Word to build faith. It happens each and every Sunday despite Satan’s attempt to mislead and distract us. But still God works—in other means too—in Baptism and the Holy Supper. Like Lydia, our hearts are opened, and through the power of the Spirit, faith is strengthened.

And then, too, as with Lydia, faith produces fruit: hands that serve, voices that proclaim, arms that comfort and provide, and legs that take us where we need to be. The Gospel of Christ crucified and risen has this effect. The victory of the empty grave lives on and on.

Clearly, there is no way to silence the effect of Easter. It goes on because Jesus lives, and because he lives, we live also. Jesus lives, and, as he lives, it is still appropriate to say: He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

The Easter Effect on Harvey and Irma

Meet Mr. and Mrs. Schluter. They celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary on March 12, 2017. That’s a big deal, especially since Mr. Schluter was over a hundred and his wife over ninety. But that’s not all. Over those years, they took in over 120 foster children, many of them disabled. They were involved with their church too. You just have to love a couple like this and might conclude this was the reason for their notoriety back then. Well, you’d be wrong. No, it wasn’t faithfulness in marriage or selfless living. It wasn’t even their faith. What got the attention of everyone were their names. You see, Mr. Schluter’s name is Harvey and Mrs. Schluter is Irma, and if you remember the fall of 2017, you’d remember Harvey and Irma were two big hurricanes that caused considerable damage and death in the United States and the Caribbean.

How typical of the world to miss the Easter effect on Harvey and Irma Schluter—open hearts, faith, and works, the fruit of faith, much like Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:15). Let us not forget the effect of Easter—true, living faith in the Savior, Jesus Christ. Nothing can silence and calm its power through our risen Savior and Lord.