

Sermon  
The Sixth Sunday of Easter  
Sunday, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa  
The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: ACTS 16:9-15; PSALM 67; REVELATION 21:10, 22-22:5; JOHN 14:23-29 OR JOHN 5:1-9

“...come and stay at my home.”

These are Lydia’s words in our reading from Acts. I am so grateful for the home I have, but I have to confess that imagining myself in Lydia’s position and inviting people on the spot to come home with me to stay makes me very uncomfortable. I have a strong urge toward – and pattern of! – frantic tidying before I have guests in our home. Most of the time, what we’d find, walking in our front door together, is a jumble of coats and shoes, meant to be neatly hung or shelved, but...not. We’d find piles of books and papers, and rugby gear, intermingled. These days, we’re likely to find my crochet wool, hunted down by our kittens, and wound around the furniture...

Lydia, as a successful businesswoman dealing in expensive purple textiles, probably didn’t have these same concerns 😊 but she had her own reasons to feel uncomfortable offering this invitation. It is clearly Lydia’s household – “when she and her household had been baptized” – no mention of a husband or father, which is unusual as women were identified at this time by their relationship to a man. Having a group of foreign men stay with her could have caused scandal. Hosting meetings where a new Messiah was worshipped rather than an emperor or an ancient pagan god could have destroyed her reputation and threatened her business.

We hear, though, that God “opened her heart”. It is this opening of heart that is key, and that is living word for us, today. Lydia’s open heart made her bold, and courageous, willing to take this risk. It is our own willingness to open our hearts that makes us bold and courageous, today, and every day. It is an openness of heart that has us be willing to be uncomfortable, and in this uncomfortableness to expand our hearts even further.

These last weeks, our lectionary has taken us through what is called “The Farewell Discourse” in John’s Gospel. We’re offered a great many words from

Jesus in this discourse, spanning chapters 14-17 in John. These words all come after Jesus has washed the disciples' feet, after they have broken bread together, on the last night of Jesus's life on earth. His words are guidance on how to live, and how to face disaster and loss. Timing and context are important: the disciples can't have been comfortable in that upper room in Jerusalem. Potential danger and disaster were rippling all around them. They must have been uncomfortable, afraid, as Jesus spoke of leaving them.

John's Gospel is mystical – mysterious. Another way of describing it is confusing! It's poetic language swirls and turns, and it offers contradictions: "I am going away, and I am coming to you." What does this mean? How? Mystery, and the mystical, it can make us uncomfortable. It can even make us afraid. We heard these words, from Jesus:

"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." He speaks of an Advocate to be with the disciples after he is gone, and a peace that the world cannot give.

We will come...and make our home with them. This morning we have Lydia's literal home, and an example of courage, and potential uncomfortableness in opening that home, and we have this figurative home, where God dwells with us, always. These examples of "home" both ask for an openness of heart. They both require trust.

Jesus says to the disciples, and he says to us: you don't need to be afraid, for we – Creator, Son, and Spirit/Advocate/Friend – will make our home with you, in you. He says: open your heart to us, and we will be with you, especially in those times that feel uncomfortable. Especially in those times when you are facing pain and loss.

This opening of heart asks us to step into the mystical. It asks us to imagine Jesus, entering our time and space and living the full human experience, from birth to death. It asks us to imagine Jesus showing us that death is not the end in the Resurrection. It asks us to imagine Jesus returning to God and drawing us into an eternal relationship with the Source of all life. It asks us to trust that Jesus's last breath on earth was not a last breath, but a beginning. A beginning of a new way to be in the world, a way that is filled with a loving Spirit with us, in us.

Episcopal priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor describes the Holy Spirit this way. She says:

“When Jesus let go of his last breath...that breath hovered in the air in front of him for a moment and then it was set loose on earth. It was such a pungent breath so full of passion, so full of life that it did not simply dissipate as so many breaths do. It grew, in strength and in volume, until it was a mighty wind, which God sent spinning through an upper room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. God wanted to make sure that Jesus’ friends were the inheritors of Jesus’ breath, and it worked...” (From “Home Another Way”)

I often think that we don’t do a good job in our humanity of distinguishing between uncomfortable and unsafe. Both can cause a hit of adrenaline. Both can constrict our hearts, and lungs. Being willing to be bold and courageous the way that Lydia was in opening her home might have caused her some moments of panic, of adrenaline. Yet she carried on! I can imagine her taking a deep breath, and continuing in her efforts. We hear later in this chapter that Lydia welcomed Paul and Silas after they had been in prison. That can’t have felt comfortable! Deep breaths would have been required in navigating this!

Quaker mystic Thomas Kelly said this:

“Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continually return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself.”

Imagining that “eternity is at our hearts” reminds us to keep them open. It reminds us that God has made a home with us, in us. It reminds us that even when our hearts feel small and closed, God is with us, breathing peace into them.

I often turn to breath prayer when I am feeling uncomfortable, or afraid. I breathe in God’s peace, and ask for God to breathe blessing into whatever I am facing. Let’s breathe together, now. I invite you to close your eyes. We breathe in God’s peace. Hold that breath, and feel that peace expanding not only your lungs,

but your heart. As you exhale, imagine that peace, and imagine God's blessing filling this space.

As we continue to sing and pray together this morning, feel that God is at home with us, here, bringing love, bringing peace, bringing blessing. Let that feeling expand the home in your heart, making it bigger. When you leave this place, take that peace and blessing with you. Expand your heart in your encounters this week, and breathe God's blessing into the world, in Jesus name. Amen.