

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year C

A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger

on May 25, 2025

[Acts 16:9-15 / Psalm 67 / Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5 / John 14:23-29](#)

May I speak, and may we all hear and learn,  
through the power of the Triune God:  
Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier.

The Lectionary in Eastertide is perhaps the most invigorating of the Church's year. It's when we get a consistent portion of the Book of Acts, and in Year C, this year, we get a consistent portion of the Revelation to John. And very exciting things happen in both of those books. And the writers write with enthusiasm!

- *we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia.*
- *she prevailed upon us.*
- *the angel carried me away to a great, high mountain.*
- *and they will reign forever and ever.*

These are very energetic phrases!

This morning, we get this story about a woman from Lydia. Her name probably wasn't Lydia, but rather, she was from a village nearby called Lydia. She was Paul's first convert *and* she was a leader in the Church. Now, just so we are clear, the only story about her is this one in Acts. But, historians have drawn a lot of history out of these few sentences. Three clues in the text tell us a lot about her:

- *a worshiper of God*
- *a dealer in purple cloth*
- *come and stay at my home*

"*A worshiper of God*" meant that she was interested in the Jewish faith, but had not converted. So, she came to Christ, not as a Jew, but as a Gentile. "*A dealer in*

*purple cloth*” meant that she was wealthy. Only the wealthy wore purple garments. Tyrian purple was an expensive dye made from mollusks. “*Come and stay at my home*” meant that she had the means to offer hospitality, but also the means to host the mission work of Paul and his companions. Foreign men staying in her house and worshipping Jesus could have ruined her reputation and her business. Yet, she and her household were baptized, and she endeavored to be faithful to the Lord...in time, talent and treasure.

All of this meant that her house would most likely have been one of the house churches of Philippi; she was probably a worship leader; she was probably a prominent member of the community, as well; and she was clearly a benefactor of the mission of the Apostles. Thus, in the Orthodox Church she is given the title “*Equal to the Apostles*”.

It’s Lydia’s charity that I want us to examine for ourselves today. The etymology of the word *charity* is quite complex because we now associate the English word to the giving of one’s time, talent or treasure to some worthy cause. In its original Latin, *caritas* is an expression of the spiritual quality of love. The New Testament was written in Greek, and the word used for *caritas* is ἀγάπη. It is ἀγάπη that Paul emphatically says is the greatest of the three theological virtues:

Νυνὶ δὲ μένει πίστις ἐλπίς ἀγάπη τὰ τρία ταῦτα μείζων δὲ τούτων ἡ ἀγάπη  
πίστις ἐλπίς ἀγάπη

Faith, hope and love.

*And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

ἀγάπη – *caritas* – *charity* in a Christian context is love in its highest manifestation. So, when we talk about *charity* as the giving of our time, talent and treasure, we need to remember that our giving of time, talent and treasure is a *spiritual* action, grounded in love and given in love.

Jesus also models this free giving out of love, asking nothing in return from the man who had been ill for 38yrs. Reading the continuation of this story, Jesus does not ask anything of the man either before or after He heals him. He doesn't ask the man to tell everyone that He is the Messiah; He doesn't say to him, "*Follow me*"; He doesn't even tell the man to believe and be baptized. Jesus does tell the man to sin no more later in the story. But Jesus receives nothing from this man. This is *caritas*, an expression of the spiritual quality of love.

When I first started giving, it was a feel-good thing. Actually, when I first started giving – albeit very little – it was a badgering thing. It was the parish annual pledge team who badgered me into pledging. That did *not* feel so good. But when I started giving of my own volition, it was a feel-good thing, and a giving back to my alma mater which gave me so much more than I can begin to express.

But then it turned into a spiritual thing. I wanted to make sure some bright kid with no money got a good education. What if s/he drops out? I don't care. Charity doesn't come with a prescribed outcome. I give to my alma mater out of *charity* – *caritas* – for the mission of the institution and for the opportunity for learning and growing. I don't expect anything in return.

And I kind of just lied with that story. That was not the first time I gave. Being badgered by the annual pledge team was not the first time I gave. Those were the first times I gave *money*. And we have to remember that *charity* is not just about money. For 5yrs I was the Youth Coordinator then Youth Director at the Cathedral – and some-time high school Sunday School teacher – as a volunteer, putting in 20-to-60 hours per week on top of my 60+ hour-per-week day job, for the *caritas* of youth ministry.

Charity is not always about money. Lydia provided hospitality to the Apostles as her first charity to the Church. And we can only surmise that she give extensively of her time, talent and treasure for the flourishing of the Church in Philippi ... out of her *charity*, her expression of the spiritual quality of love.

Charity, hospitality, philanthropy are spiritual issues. It's never about what you get from doing it. It's about what you do with what God has already given you. It is the offering of the gifts back to God what is already God's and God has given you.

This concept of giving back to God what God has already given us is expressed at the offering of the gifts, the offering of the bread, wine and collection plates on the altar. At the 8am Service we say:

*Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendor, and the majesty;*

***for everything in heaven and on earth is Yours.***

***All things come from You, and of Your own do we give You.***

At the 10am Service we sing:

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow.**

All good gifts come from God, all that we have comes from God. Therefore, when we give in *charity*, we are giving from God and in praise of God. We offer *charity / caritas* to the Christ who is in every person. The *caritas* we do for others is love directed primarily toward God.

I was reading the entry on *charity* in one of my Christian ethics books. It posed questions around what restrictions should be placed on Christian charity:

- *Aiding victims vs. combating the structures of injustice that created those victims?*
- *Whether or not to work with non-Christian organizations?*
- *Building organizations or remaining grassroots?*
- *Being explicitly Christian and requiring a spiritual element from the recipients?*

And so on. But Werner G. Jeanrond writing in the *Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* puts our *charity* into simple terms for us:

*Every opportunity we have to meet the needs of others is in itself a gift of God. So, Christian charity must be seen and developed within the framework of faith in God's grace and of hope for God's emerging reign on earth. The ultimate criterion for judging expressions of Christian charity is willingness to serve human beings – while respecting their dignity as God's creatures – and not one's own ego and its intricate projects. Thus Christian charity constantly requires both spiritual nourishment and self-critical examination.*

Charity is a spiritual issue, not a quantitative transaction. You give because you love; you give because you *are* loved.

The gift of *charity* is God's gift to the giver. Like the man who had been ill for 38yrs, we have been told to stand up, take our mat and walk, so that in *caritas*, we may help others do the same.