

## **Purple**

*May 9, 2010*

(Easter 6 – Year C)

Acts 16: 9-15

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

*Please be seated*

Back in the 1970s and 80s, one of the most successful businesswomen in the world was a woman from Dallas named Mary Kay Ash. Mary Kay Ash started her own business called Mary Kay Cosmetics. Mary Kay was a savvy saleswoman, knowing just how to get her cosmetics out there in the market place in front of other women. Mary Kay empowered other women, encouraging them to reach their highest potential by becoming an unbeatable female marketing network for her cosmetics.

Mary Kay Ash became a Texas icon, with big Texas hair and a big fake eyelashes and a big pink Cadillac that she drove around Dallas. And when one of Mary Kay's girls reached a sales pinnacle, that woman got her very own pink Cadillac.

In fact, when you drove around Texas in the oil boom days of the late 70s and early 80s, if you saw a pink Cadillac on the road, it was most likely driven by one of Mary Kay's girls. And that distinctive shade of light pink became Mary Kay's trademark - as her Pink Mansion in Dallas, her big pink car and everything about her seemed to just ooze - with the color of pink.

Back 2000 years ago, one of the most successful businesswomen in the European world was a woman who lived in the city of Philippi named Lydia. Lydia ran her own business, possibly named Lydia's Boutique of the Purple Cloth.

Luke, the writer of the Book of Acts, makes no mention whatsoever of a man who helped to support or to manage Lydia's business in Philippi.

But the Book of Acts does tell us that Lydia was a seller of purple cloth.

And that distinctive shade of royal purple became Lydia's trademark - as her big home, her big car and everything about her seemed to just ooze - with the color of purple.

Back 2000 years ago, in ancient Greece where the city of Philippi was located, the purple dye that was used to make purple cloth was extremely expensive.

Purple dye had to be gathered drop by drop from the veins of certain shellfish.

Even an ounce of purple dye was extremely expensive.

It was for this reason that only the wealthy, only the powerful, only royalty were able to purchase and wear purple cloth.

Therefore, Lydia ran one of the most exclusive shops in all of the city of Philippi:

Lydia's Boutique of the Purple Cloth.

Meanwhile, the Apostle Paul crosses over into Europe by boat.

Paul arrives in the city of Philippi and looks for the place where the worshipers of the one true God meet to pray.

And Paul spots Lydia, with her big Philippian hairdo and her big purple Cadillac, praying down by the riverside.

Paul tells Lydia the good news of Jesus Christ.

Lydia and her whole household of servants and all of her saleswomen are then baptized.

After this conversion, Lydia offers hospitality, saying:

"Paul, please come and stay at my big purple mansion on Rodeo Drive."

Yet, I wonder:

What was the good news that Paul told to Lydia that convinced her to become the first Christian on the European continent?

I believe that the good news of Jesus Christ that Lydia heard was that her purple cloth was not only for the rich, the famous and the royal.

I believe that the good news of Jesus Christ that Lydia heard is that purple cloth is now for everyone.

A window into my belief comes from what happens next in the story in the Book of Acts.

After Lydia, the powerful seller of purple cloth, is baptized, In the next scene, a slave girl, at the bottom of the social ladder is converted.

Then in the next scene, Paul and Silas are put in jail and they sing hymns all night long.

From this, the jailer who is holding them captive is converted and he and his household are baptized.

After the conversions of Lydia, then the slave girl, then the jailer, all of them gather at Lydia's home, as a place of hospitality.

I can just imagine that first meeting of the first church in Philippi at Lydia's house.

The ex-slave girl and the ex-prison guard walk up to the door of the big purple mansion.

And Lydia greets her new Christian sister and brother with open arms. They all share their stories of personal conversion to Jesus Christ while sitting on a purple sofa, eating off purple dinner plates and sipping on purple drinks with tiny umbrellas in them.

And then, I imagine that Lydia asks her new fellow parishioners this question:

Have either of you ever worn anything purple?

Of course, neither the slave girl nor the jailer have ever worn anything purple in their lives.

Purple is way too expensive and rich and royal for common folks to wear.

So then, Lydia goes into her coat closet and pulls out two purple robes and places them on the shoulders of each of her new friends, clothing her new friends in the rich purple of royalty.

For in Jesus Christ, we have all become a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

Once we were not a people,

But now we are God's people.

Once we had not received mercy,

But now we have received mercy.<sup>1</sup>

Once we did not love equally,

But now we are loved equally.

Once we were not worthy to wear purple,

But now we are clothed in rich and luxurious and royal purple cloth.

What did the Apostle Paul say down by the riverside to Lydia, the seller of purple cloth?

I believe that the Apostle Paul told Lydia that she was saved, saved from a life where only the rich and the royal could wear her purple clothing.

And I believe that Jesus Christ tells us, today, that we are saved from a life where only the rich and the royal are worthy enough to be valued and loved.

The first church in the city of Philippi, the first church on the continent of Europe, was made up of 3 people:

A high-class businesswoman with a purple Cadillac, a low-class slave girl and a middle-class corrections officer.

Yet all of them were welcomed with open arms into Lydia's royal purple mansion.

And St. Alban's Episcopal Church is made of all classes and races and persuasions of people:

High class, middle class, low class - and even no class.

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 Peter 2:9-10

Yet all of us are welcomed into these doors with open arms and are draped in the purple cloth of royalty.

For in Jesus Christ, we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood.  
In Jesus Christ, we have been saved, saved from division by race or class.

In Jesus Christ, we have received mercy and grace and love.

In Jesus Christ, you have been made worthy,  
Worthy to wear - purple.

AMEN.

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