

I want us to look at the New Testament book of Philippians, but first we will do a bit of background
Today, we'll look at Acts 16:6-15 and next Sunday, we will do the rest of Acts 16

Paul was a follower of Jesus, following a dramatic conversion on the Road to Damascus
As a missionary, he travelled north to Turkey, Greece, and Italy telling the good news of Jesus
We find him in Acts 16, where he is travelling with Silas and Timothy in present day Turkey
They intend to travel north to Bithynia, but the Spirit didn't allow them to go there
So, they went west to Troas where Paul had a vision during the night
He saw a man standing in Macedonia, pleading with him to come and help them
They were convinced that God had called them to proclaim the good news to Macedonia

They went to Philippi, which is the main city in Macedonia, part of what is now Greece
Philippi, an important commerce center is about 10 miles inland on the main road in the area
It is surrounded by mountains and near the sea
Whoever controls Philippi, strategically controls the whole area
Philippi is a Roman colony in a Greek area and is very diverse culturally and religiously
There is a lot of religious diversity, although not too many Jews and no synagogue

They were in Philippi for several days
On the Sabbath, they went outside the gate by the river
Since there was no synagogue in Philippi, they thought this would be a place of prayer
Greeks experienced places of "living water" as holy
They sat down and talked with the women that had gathered there and shared the Good News
One of the women was Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, from Thyatira in Turkey
As a dealer in expensive purple cloth, it is assumed that she had some wealth
Lydia was a worshiper of God and opened her heart to the words Paul was saying
Lydia and her household were baptized as followers of Jesus
She prevailed upon Paul and the others to come and stay at her home
Lydia became the leader of the first European church, which began with a small band of women
This is the house church that receives the letter to the Philippians

The thing I'm struck with in this passage is that we make plans and then life happens
Paul has plans to go one place, but that door is closed, and he hears a call to go another place
Willingly, Paul changes his plans to respond to the Leading that he receives
It doesn't seem that anyone is in Macedonia waiting for him
The man in his vision doesn't appear in real life
Paul hangs out in town for a few days...
we aren't told what he does so likely it's unimportant to the story
On the Sabbath, he always goes to worship and therefore goes to the most likely gathering place
Lydia is there and is drawn to his message and ends up as the leader of a house church in Philippi

It's also true for us... We make plans and life happens... whether it be the coronavirus or something else
Some plans are derailed or never happen, while other options open up before us
Always, we are Listening for next steps and way forward, faithful to the nudges
Sometimes, there are Openings, which are clearly new insights that lead to significant ministry
Again, we are faithful to the Leadings, big and small, as they present themselves to us

What Leadings present themselves to you today? How have you been faithful to follow those Leadings?