

Easter 6C: We are all significant in God's plans

1. On the evening of April 26, 1777 the British threatened the area of Danbury CT
 - a. Beginning at 9 p.m., Sybil Ludington rode side-saddle through 40 miles of rough terrain, ordering her father's men to muster at her house.
 - i. By the time she returned home the next morning, 400 troops were assembled and ready to fight.
 - ii. While they were too late to save the town, they joined the Continental army the next day and successfully chased the British out of CT.
 - iii. Sybil was treated as a hero, even getting a commendation from George Washington.
 - iv. Have you ever heard of Sybil Ludington? Probably not
 - b. As many of you know history is littered with tens of millions of people who never got any recognition yet did amazing things or enabled others to do so.
 - i. Today we find one such person in our reading from Acts – Lydia.
 - ii. Have you ever heard of her? Probably not
 - iii. As we see from Acts, she was in the city of Philippi to which Paul wrote Philippians, it was an important city in his ministry and the Bible
 - c. This week's text from Acts follows last week's reading where 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).
 - i. This is significant because in today's text the Gospel reaches Europe, a place of Gentiles.
 - ii. This is the last Sunday before Ascension, which means that the Easter season is coming to a close, and you might be tired of hearing, "He is risen. He is risen indeed!"
 - iii. The power and effect of the resurrection might be starting to feel like old news, but in this text we see the effect of the resurrection and the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - iv. Paul's actual message to Lydia is not recorded, but its effect is. Lydia is baptized along with her entire household, and then she opens her home to the believers there. This is the fruit of the Gospel and power of the resurrection.
 - d. And yet this little snippet in Scripture is all that we know of her.
 - i. First, she was from Thyatira, a city of Asia Minor famous for making dyes.
 - ii. No doubt this fact led to the second thing we learn about her: she was a "seller of purple goods."
 - iii. The third fact is that she was described as a "worshiper of God".
 - iv. We don't know what that means – whether she was Jewish or as we hear in other places "one who fears God" which would be Gentiles who believed that the God of Israel was the true God, but who had not converted to Judaism like the Roman centurion whose servant Jesus healed (Lk 7:4-5)

2. That's it, doesn't seem very significant, does it?
 - a. This is one of those little vignettes that goes down in the biblical record that we can identify with
 - i. Like the unnamed servant girl recorded in the OT who sent the Syrian general Naaman to Israel to be cured of leprosy and subsequently became a believer (2 Ki 5:3) – never mentioned again
 - ii. Or the sons of Simon of Cyrene, Rufus and Alexander, only mentioned in Mark's Gospel – what was their significance? (Mk 15:21)
 - iii. How many of us are any more than a brief footnote in our respective communities let alone world history?
 - iv. Yet you are precisely whom the Lord uses for His kingdom because we are all significant in God's plans.
 - b. Remember who Jesus was and the "significance" of His life
 - i. Born to a poor carpenter, grew up in obscurity in Nazareth ("can anything good come from Nazareth?" was Nathanael's question in Jn 1:46) with the stigma that maybe Joseph wasn't his father
 - ii. He preached to thousands, was wildly popular, but was crucified as a criminal alone and abandoned by His followers
 - iii. As Isaiah tells us, **"he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him...But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace."** (Is 53:2,5)
 - iv. Yet in the disguise of obscurity the creator of all changed history and redeemed for God a people of faith through His death and resurrection
3. This is how God's Kingdom operates and grows and how it continues to change the world – through the ordinary
 - a. Lydia was enabled to listen to the message that Paul preached, as a result she used her resources to support the ongoing mission of the Gospel, her faith resulted in action
 - i. What we see in Lydia is just how powerful the message of Easter is— it brings life and salvation!
 - ii. We see an open heart that hears the Word and receives the gifts from Word and Baptism to create faith.
 - iii. Then we see evidence of that faith in good works—the hospitality she offers to Paul and his companions.
 - iv. God calls. God opens hearts. God creates faith, and God empowers for service.
 - b. Our Lord chose twelve rather ordinary men, some with chequered pasts – zealots, tax collectors and even hell-raisers, James and John the sons of thunder.
 - i. Even Paul recognized in I Cor, **"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth."** (I Cor 1:26)

- ii. Just as the Lord chose 12 ordinary men He continues to use ordinary people in every-day life to spread the Gospel
 - iii. As you are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live lives of faith in the world, you bring that witness into the office/school - people notice
 - iv. Like Sybil Ludington or Lydia you probably will not be remembered in the annals of history but through your witness others hear the Good News – whether it's your children, family, friends, etc for eternal life
 - c. So that having been fed and nourished here the Holy Spirit works in you a new perspective – all of the resources that God has entrusted to you become resources that you willingly use to further the Gospel
 - i. Our lives of faith are not lives of contemplative isolation, but rather active lives of Stewardship
 - ii. Where we use our time, skills, and money in service of others in the name of Christ
 - iii. Ordinary people empowered by the Holy Spirit through ordinary means – the Word, water, bread, and wine to live extraordinary lives of faith
 - iv. We are all significant in God's plan!
- 4. Maybe right now, though, you don't feel very significant.
 - a. Maybe the effect of Easter left you long ago – that is the work of the devil
 - i. He wants nothing more than to steal your victory and lead you to despair.
 - ii. If possible, his goal is to turn your eyes from the empty tomb and turn them inward to yourself and your worldly desires.
 - iii. But you don't have to listen to his lies, turn again to the message of the Easter miracle!
 - iv. Let your heart rejoice in what God has done for you yes even you because the message isn't just for everyone else – it is for you!
 - b. Because we are all significant in God's plan of salvation
 - i. This is how God sanctifies our whole existence, no longer is the one who goes off to become a priest/pastor the only one who's living out a godly vocation.
 - ii. Rather it's through your life of service that God furthers His Kingdom in everyday ordinary ways
 - iii. My friends you may not even be as famous as Lydia or Ms. Ludington but take heart and rejoice because God has made you life significant through the blood of Christ for the sake of His Gospel