

**Acts 16:9-15** (NRSV)

<sup>9</sup> During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” <sup>10</sup> When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

**The Conversion of Lydia**

<sup>11</sup> We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, <sup>12</sup> and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district<sup>[a]</sup> of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. <sup>13</sup> On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. <sup>14</sup> A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. <sup>15</sup> When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us.



***The Fabric of Life and Faith***

VIDEO on Piecemakers from WIVB

PRAYER: Living, Loving Christ, who sent us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit to be with us always: we are humbled by our riches. We thank you for the gift of the Piecemakers’ ministry: for those who conceived it, and those who saw its worth; for those who continue to support this ministry, and for those who will join it in the future. Most of all, we thank you for the recipients of each

quilt, with its warmth, love, and prayer. May their challenges be eased, and may their anxieties be comforted. For we pray in the name of Love Incarnate. Amen.

As we heard in our scripture text this morning, God had been blessing Paul’s missionary journeys to many places, too challenging to pronounce. Luke was now traveling with Paul, and making record of the sharing of the good news of Christ for the benefit of future generations ~ including us! News had reached this missionary band that there was a group of God worshippers down by the river. Indeed, it was a group of women, deep in prayer. Paul told the women about Jesus, the long-awaited messiah, and they, along with a woman named Lydia came to faith in Christ. Luke describes Lydia as a businesswoman who dealt in purple cloth. What made this cloth valuable was the fact that it was very much in high demand because purple was the color of royalty. Not only did the royal family show

off their fashions made of Lydia's cloth, but those who wanted to impress the royalty did as well. Lydia had amassed substantial wealth, which she then generously used to support the work and ministry of those who believed in Christ.

Those who have riches....of wealth, of skill, of witness, of passion, are always given the opportunity to share: generously, radically, hopefully....

Isn't that what the Piecemakers ministry is all about?!? With donated and purchased fabrics, a group of 30 or more women gather weekly to create quilts that will softly and warmly convey the love of the creators and the prayers of this congregation to each and every recipient. And did you read all about this year's recipients in the most recent issue of our newsletter? It's amazing!

We just received a note of gratitude from the Child Advocacy Center to which were delivered 44 children's cuddle quilts. This Center provides services to address the needs of abused children and their families. How precious a cuddle quilt must be to each recipient seeking protection and healing!

The Piecemakers provide quilts for each child or adult with whom we celebrate Christian Baptism here. Time after time I receive pictures of these children wrapped in the warmth of their quilt, a tangible reminder of the embrace of God at this time of receiving God's grace and blessing.

And of course, in previous years on Memorial Day weekend, hundreds of quilts have been dedicated and sent to military personnel conveying our gratitude for their service with prayers for the healing of wounds of body, mind, and spirit.

About six weeks ago I requested a child's quilt to be sent to 4 year old Jackson Vandermark. Jackson has spent more than half of his young life in hospitals being treated for a congenital heart condition. He received the quilt one week after his heart transplant in NYC. Still heavily sedated in the Cardiac ICU, his grandmother (one of my former parishioners) gave Jackson the quilt. The thank you note I received this week mentioned that Jackson is not often far from his "blankie-quilt," and that he told his surgeon that angels had brought it to him. Jackson is now home from the hospital, and I heard he is going camping this weekend!

The Piecemakers also sent more than 20 bed runners to UNYTS this year. UNYTS is Western New York's only organ, eye, tissue, and community blood donation center. They work to assist donor families at that tender time when the loss of one life may actually save another.

Our Piecemakers were recently commissioned by Kenmore Mercy Hospital to create 2 pall quilts for the last journey of deceased patients. Many hands contributed toward this effort to provide a sign of loving embrace for that which once housed a precious living spirit.

And an amazingly meaningful ministry is fashioning prayer quilts as a vehicle of the intentional and focused prayers of this congregation for someone facing significant life challenges. Each tie on these quilts contains three prayers knots: one for the recipient, one for the recipient's family, and one for the recipient's care providers. Now there are literally hundreds of stories that could be told about how meaningful these prayer quilts are to their recipients. But today, I have received permission to tell you about Helen Stoberl's experience. This is my condensed version, so if you seek more details, or would like to offer a hug, you can see Helen personally!

Helen told me that in 2012 in a couple of short months, she experienced a whole host of serious health issues. One day she suddenly collapsed, and while hospitalized, it happened again. Tests revealed a brain bleed, there were difficulties with a pacemaker, through ensuing weeks of tests a mass was discovered on an ovary which had spread throughout her abdomen, and then a spot was discovered on her lung, which was also cancerous. In the midst of all of that, Peter LeValley had visited and brought Helen a cuddle quilt from the Piecemakers. After a series of surgeries and complications, through which anyone might have become discouraged and disheartened, Helen received a second quilt. She said that they were just like a big old hug from the church. One of those quilts is now displayed on the wall in the Stoberl home where she can see it every day and be reminded of how God has blessed Helen on this journey toward health, and how the church surrounded her with care through it all.

I have also heard several stories about families of prayer quilt recipients. Long after the life issues have been resolved, through healing or through release from a troubled life, the prayer quilts continue to offer comfort care to those precious to the original recipient. The prayers and care continue to give solace, warmth, and reminders of blessing.

As I visited with some of the Piecemakers on Friday, Liz described their relationships as a sisterhood, a camaraderie. She said that for some who do not have sisters, or mothers, or daughters nearby, these women form a bond that is life-nurturing...like loving family. When followers of Christ work together to reach out with love and care to those in need, and those we are connecting with divine love, we grow as a community... we are the church, the body of Christ.

Like Lydia, generously sharing sustaining resources with those offering the good news of Christ, we celebrate our Piecemakers, who generously share their skills and talents that others might receive tangible signs of Christ's love.

#### CLOSING LITANY PRAYER

We give thanks, creator God, for those who gather to select, cut, press, sew, and tie. Bless them as they gather in a community of love to create tangible signs of our prayers, our care, and your grace.

**Praise be to God!**

We give thanks, loving God, for the creativity and care, love and hope, that is sewn into each and every quilt. Bless those who answer your call to show mercy and kindness to those in need.

**Praise be to God!**

We give thanks, guiding God, for the lessons of these quilts. Help us to see the beauty in the variety of colors and patterns and to forgive the imperfections just as you see the beauty in each of us and accept and forgive our imperfections.

**Praise be to God!**

Patient God, remind us that our prayers and your love never die. Renew the prayers of these quilts that they may continue to bring comfort and peace to those who have received them, and to their loved ones.

**Praise be to God!**

Everlasting God, remind us that you are with those who cry out to you. Remind those who need healing, comfort, rest, courage, strength, patience, renewal, and hope that they are covered not only in these quilts, but in the quilt of your eternal love.

**Praise be to God!**

Restorer God, send your Spirit to fill us, renew us, and energize us for the days ahead. Allow us to be clothed with your Spirit of light, love, and truth, and to go forth from this place to continue our ministry to share your love with others.

**Praise be to God! Amen.**