

Sermon Evensong 16th August 2026

2 Kings 4:1–37 and Acts 16:1–15

In the name of the Living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

There is something wonderfully unpredictable about the way God works.

We might imagine that, when God wishes to change the world, he does so through great events: kings and armies, miracles and revolutions, famous people and dramatic moments. Certainly, our readings contained miracles but when we look more closely, they are also both filled with the very ordinary: *a jar of oil, a meal, a spare room, a journey, a conversation beside a river, an invitation into someone's home.*

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Perhaps that tells us something important about the providence of God.

God often does extraordinary things through very ordinary acts of faithfulness. Our readings this evening were a bit of a theme-fest, so you will no doubt be relieved to hear I intend to focus on just the one theme of **HOSPITALITY**.

The reading from 2 Kings described “a wealthy woman” of Shunem. We are not told her name. Whenever Elisha passes through the town, she gives him something to eat. Eventually she says to her husband:

“Look, I am sure that this man who regularly passes our way is a holy man of God.”

So they build a small room for him on the roof.

It contains a bed, a table, a chair and a lamp.

Nothing elaborate.

The woman does not perform some spectacular religious act. She simply makes space for the servant of God.

And in doing so she makes space for God.

There is a profound biblical principle here.

Hospitality is not simply being sociable. It is making room.

Making room in our homes.

Making room in our lives.

Making room in our churches.

Making room in our hearts.

And often, when we make room for another person, we discover that somehow, we have also made room for God.

Then in Acts Paul has begun another missionary journey. Timothy joins him, and they travel through Phrygia and Galatia before arriving in Macedonia.

Amongst a group of women praying beside a river is Lydia. She is a dealer in purple cloth from Thyatira — evidently a woman of some independence and means.

And then Luke gives us one of the most beautiful descriptions of conversion in the New Testament:

“The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul.”

“The Lord opened her heart.”

Paul speaks.

Lydia listens.

But God opens the heart.

There is something immensely liberating about that for the Church.

Our task is to bear faithful witness to Christ.

We can preach.

We can teach.

We can invite.

We can welcome.

We can love.

We can answer questions.

But we cannot manufacture faith in another person.

That is God’s work.

“The Lord opened her heart.”

Perhaps that should shape the way we think about mission.

Mission is not primarily persuading reluctant people to join our institution.

It is learning to notice where God may already be opening hearts.

Paul does not begin in a synagogue building. He goes outside the city gate, down beside a river, where people have gathered for prayer.

And there he meets Lydia.

God has arrived before Paul.

And surely that remains true today.

When we go beyond the familiar boundaries of the Church, we do not take God into a godless world.

God is already there.

In the school.

In the workplace.

In the care home.

In the pub.

In the family struggling behind closed doors.

In the person who would never dream of entering a church but who has begun asking questions about meaning and hope.

In the person who suddenly wonders whether they might pray but isn't sure how.

God is already there.

Our calling is to discern what God is doing and to join in.

And what is Lydia's first response when her heart is opened?

Hospitality.

After she and her household are baptised, she says to Paul and his companions:

"If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home."

And Luke adds:

"And she prevailed upon us."

And so, our two readings meet.

The unnamed Shunammite woman says, in effect, **Come and stay here.**

Lydia says, **Come and stay in my home.**

Both women make room.

And when they make room, God does remarkable things.

So perhaps, as this day draws towards its close, we might ask ourselves:

What do I have that God might use?

Where might God be redirecting me?

For whom might I make room?

And where, even now, might the Lord be opening a heart?

Because Christian hospitality is more than offering tea and biscuits, important though those things undoubtedly are.

Christian hospitality means creating a place where another person can discover that they are welcome.

It means listening to someone whose story is different from ours.

It means noticing the person standing at the edge.

It means refusing to divide the world too quickly into insiders and outsiders.

It means creating space in which God can work.

For the kingdom of God so often begins with the very ordinary:

a jar of oil, a meal, a spare room, a journey, a conversation beside a river, an invitation into someone's home.

Small things placed into the hands of an extraordinary God.

Amen.