

What's Your Legacy?
Acts 16
Don Lincoln

Take a look at this postcard and for those worshipping on the phone, it's an image of a pre-stamped, 1-cent postcard, and addressed in scrawled handwriting says this:

**To the president of a college somewhere in Kentucky
where boys can work their way through school
Do not know their address
Postmaster General KY**

The Postmaster General of Kentucky got the postcard to the right place – **Berea College**, in the foothills of Kentucky, 2 hours south of Cincinnati. Founded in 1855 by a once Presbyterian minister and a collection of protestant abolitionists – the minister having detested his father's slaveholding practice – Berea College was the first college in the South to be both coeducational and racially integrated. It maintains a Christian identity with no denominational ties. The school's motto, taken from directly the book of Acts is this: "God has made of one blood all the peoples of the earth."

And, as the writer of the postcard had heard, there **was** a Kentucky college that charged no tuition. **Berea College**. From its beginning, Berea's mission has been to serve academically accomplished students who cannot afford to attend college. If you can afford tuition, you will not be admitted.

No Berea student pays tuition. Students work 10-15 hours per week in approved jobs on campus or in the community and receive a paycheck each week. **AND** more than 60% of the students regularly and voluntarily make a contribution from that paycheck back to the college endowment which pays all tuitions.

In 2020, **59%** of Berea's students were first generation college students. 70% of the students are from Appalachia. US News and World Report ranks Berea #1 in the country in terms of student debt.

Why do I know this, and why am I telling you? Because I still remember my visit to Berea when I was in middle school, to learn about Berea's mission, and to learn why Berea College received strong financial support from the Northminster Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati to which I belonged. Northminster, for decades, had a mission partnership with Berea College – and from its annual budget financially supported Berea's mission and endowment so Berea can do what they do.

Leveraging resources for the sake of others is something we all understand. That's why I'm back to a favorite story from the book of Acts.

In our text from Acts, the Apostle Paul is on his **second** missionary journey. Paul had planned to visit churches planted on his FIRST missionary journey. To see how they were doing, to encourage them. But on the way, the Spirit redirects Paul and his companions elsewhere. Through a vision, they are invited to a new territory – Macedonia. The first entrance of the Gospel to Europe.

Paul travels to Philippi in Macedonia, and at a prayer meeting by the river meets Lydia. Lydia is a seller of purple cloth, a color associated with royal garb. That's because the dye is made from a tiny mollusk that grows only in that region of the Mediterranean. It's called the murex, and it's incredibly difficult (and outrageously aromatic – smelly I might add) to procure the couple drops of liquid from the little snail and very time consuming and costly to distill it into this expensive, purple dye.

We don't know how Lydia got her start, but she's impressive. Her clients are the rich and famous of Philippi. She is a prominent businesswoman, in command of her own life and her own household. She is also a God-fearer – a Gentile attracted to the spirituality of Judaism – she's spiritually hungry.

On the sabbath at the river, Paul shares the gospel with a group of women, and the text tells us “The Lord opened Lydia's heart.” Lydia hears the Gospel of Jesus Christ and she and her whole household are baptized. The first – the first – European Christian. A woman. Lydia.

Immediately, the text says, Lydia prevailed upon Paul and friends: “Come, stay in my house. **Mi casa, su casa.** I will take care of your daily needs, whatever you need, my expense.” Paul and his companions take her up on the offer – after all, the text DOES say, “she prevailed on us” – and her home becomes an outpost for their missionary work beginning in Europe.

Fast forward. Later in Acts, Paul and friend Silas are in prison. That's another story, but when they are finally set free, where do they go? Lydia's house. Lydia, the patron of the Gospel. In all likelihood, HER home became the “house church” in the city of **Philippi. As in “Philippians.”**

Much later, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, “I've been all over the world – and there's no church like the Philippians. Nobody rolls out the red carpet for me like the Philippians. When I wasn't with you, you prayed for me. When I was in Thessalonica, you were sending money to help me out. What a blessing you are to me!” That's what Paul says about the Philippians. And it all started with Lydia – her hospitality and her generosity.

Leveraging resources to make a difference; a difference that impacted **any of us in here of European descent**. Because the church in Europe had its first patron in a woman named Lydia. And in us, Lydia's legacy continues.

Something I wanted to do before I finished my ministry started to unfold this past weekend. It's why I'm preaching this sermon. I recently sent letters to 43 households who have indicated Westminster is in their estate plans, thanking them for their generosity and their thoughtfulness. I also wanted to make sure – before I retire – the church has accurate information from those households regarding their plans. That there will be a file folder for a new business manager detailing what those plans are. That was one of my goals this year before I finished. The other half of that goal was to commend to the rest of the congregation to consider joining that living legacy group.

My mother and father died in 2018 and 2019 respectively – one year apart to the day. And while it wasn't written in their will, they had made it clear on numerous occasions that my sisters and I were to divide 10% of their estate equally between two places: the Northminster Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, where my folks belonged more than 65 years, and the Westminster College in New Wilmington, PA; where my grandfather taught music for 40 years and my mother and her siblings all received music degrees.

Can you imagine how fun it was to cold call the advancement office at Westminster College to ask how much money was required to establish a scholarship in my grandparents' names? And what a joy it was to learn the gift was more than adequate to establish the Alan B. and Eleanor Mentch Davis Scholarship to support students working toward a degree in music education.

And just as meaningful was when I called that same church in Cincinnati that contributed to the mission of Berea College, the church of my baptism, confirmation and ordination, to inform them they would receive \$50,000 from my parents' estate at the beginning of 2020. Uncanny, that the timing of that unexpected gift enabled that congregation to purchase the equipment that **enabled them** to start live streaming worship during the pandemic. Live streaming. Something my father knew so well and appreciated so much as he worshipped with Westminster each week once he was no longer able to get out to church.

We stand on the shoulders of those who went before us; those who were generous with time, talent and treasure **for OUR BENEFIT**. If you don't have a will, let me encourage you to get one done.

If you do have a will, but have made no arrangements to share a portion of your estate with a ministry you care about, I invite you – right now – to jot a note to yourself – or email or text yourself – to consider designating a portion of your estate to Westminster Presbyterian Church, because you want to see this ministry continue to thrive and grow long beyond your time here. Leveraging resources for the sake of others – just as has been done by others for each and every one of us more times than we can count.

I would love for there to be many, many more households establishing estate plans – however small or large – to perpetuate the ministry of this great congregation.

You know, 10% of an estate to a charitable cause leaves plenty – 90% – for your beneficiaries. But such a charitable designation can make a HUGE DIFFERENCE to a ministry. There's a congregation in Cincinnati whose ministry continued for two years through the pandemic because somebody thought about leaving them a legacy gift.

I invite you, friends, to consider what is – what WILL BE your legacy? May it be a blessing upon what God is continuing to do.

May it be so. AMEN.