The Australasian Catholic Record

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OCTOBER 2019

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Lydia: Open-Hearted to Mission

Rosemary Canavan*

Even today entering Neapolis, modern day Kavala, in Greece it is possible to imagine Paul stepping off a ship onto the landing. This is the craft of the author of Luke’s Gospel and the Acts of the Apostle to engage the hearer in the narrative he constructs: in Acts, the birth and mission of the church is a story in which the audience have a role. According to Acts, Paul followed a vision, a call from a certain Macedonian to ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’ (Acts 16:9). What would he have expected to find as he set out on a sea voyage from Asia to Macedonia, the home of Alexander the Great? Paul’s landing is commemorated on a wall mosaic with ancient stone bollards and pillars slightly inland from the current promenade where the fishing boats line up around the bay. Paul’s embarkation on this journey has all the hallmarks of mission. His journey will take him to Philippi and beyond. The focus here is particularly on his encounter with Lydia and the flourishing of this mission in a distinct and different place with new opportunities for the development and growth of leadership and community. In particular I will concentrate on the insights of this narrative for the engagement with new frontiers in our present day.

The Narrative

The stage is set for Paul’s entry to Macedonia with a number of manoeuvres. In just one sentence the narrative reports that he and his companions have travelled through the region of Phrygia and Galatia (Acts 16:16). Realising that they are travelling by foot this is clearly a number of days’ journey. The

* Dr Rosemary Canavan is Senior Lecturer in New Testament and Academic Dean at Catholic Theological College, University of Divinity, Melbourne. Her research and publications reflect her interest in the Pauline letters, particularly Colossians and Thessalonians, as well as interest in the role of women in the early church. This article was originally commissioned by Fabrizio Meroni for the edited volume, Missio Ad Gentes in the Acts of the Apostles (Rome: Urbaniana, 2019), and is destined for online publication. Thank you to Fabrizio Meroni, who is Secretary General of the Pontifical Missionary Union, for granting Dr Canavan permission to publish this article in the Australasian Catholic Record. Paul’s letter to the Philippians makes no mention of Lydia nor any reference to this call.