

26<sup>th</sup> June 2022

## Diversity

**“I think it pisses God off if you walk by the colour purple  
in a field somewhere and don’t notice it.”**

Alice Walker, *The Colour Purple* (1982)

Lydia of Thyatira is the first documented convert to Christianity in Europe. Several Christian denominations have her as a saint. The Book of Acts says:

*A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one who worshipped God, heard us [the first Apostles], whose heart the Lord opened to listen to the things which were spoken by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and stay.’ So she persuaded us.*

Thyatira (in western Turkey) was famous for its purple dye. So Lydia, a seller of purple cloth, had status, and is often known as “The Woman of Purple”.

What is it about purple? *The Warning*, a poem by Jenny Joseph, begins: “When I am an old woman, I shall wear purple”, the implication being that wearing purple is a break from convention, a bold statement of becoming a radical in old age. Through the ages, purple has been worn by kings, queens and emperors, as a symbol of grandeur and power, because purple dye was too expensive for ordinary people. In Church circles, purple is still the colour of authority, being associated with bishops. In any writing, “purple prose” is deemed to be pretentious or overly embellished. In sports, a “purple patch” is a streak of wins or successes.

A woman from the Bible, status, radicalism, grandeur, power, authority, embellishment, success ... Purple evokes so many diverse responses, it has to be worth noticing and reflecting on.

If all the world was purple, it wouldn’t be much fun. But if we see purple as a window through which we can appreciate a world full of colour and variety, in cultures, traditions, music, art, dress, attitudes, the human body and social mores, are we not the better for that? Alice Walker suggests that it “pisses God off” when we fail to notice that, like the colour purple in a field as we pass by. Please don’t be offended by her language, for she points to an important truth: from the first century’s Lydia, “The Woman of Purple”, to our present-day society, let’s keep noticing and being aware of variety, and celebrate diversity, in our remarkable world.

### **A prayer for today**

*Lord, help me not to walk by and not notice your wonderful, diverse world. Amen*

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