

Easter 7, Year C - June 2nd 2019

Readings - John 17:20-26, Rev. 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; Acts 16:16-34, Psalm 91 (Psalm 1)

This week I have been asked several times if I have ever preached before. I have consistently answered that I have and that in my former tradition I was considered a short preacher - my sermons lasted only 25-30 minutes, instead of the normal hour....

The season of Easter is drawing to a close. Thursday was the Feast of the Ascension where we celebrated Jesus ascending into heaven. Next Sunday is Pentecost. In the life of the church these few days are ones covered in a few verses at the beginning of the book of Acts. The church is down to 120, in an upper room - down from the crowds that waved palms branches a few short weeks ago.

Our reading in Acts is part of a wonderful story about Paul and his companions - Timothy, Silas, and Luke. They are working in what today would be southern and central Turkey, when Paul has a vision of man asking them to help in Macedonia. Paul being Paul, they immediately go and cross the Anatolia peninsula, and then cross the sea, and end up in Philippi. They go to where they think they will find a prayer group and meet Lydia. They talk, she believes and is baptized, and they stay with her.

On the way back to that place of prayer is where the story begins. It is full of interesting points -

- There's mocking. - Day after day for a prolonged period. If her statements weren't sarcastic, why would Paul have been upset?
- There's slavery.
- There's the supernatural - a spirit, and its leaving.
- There's exploitation - she was being exploited by her owner, and that's what triggers the arrest.
- Racism - "they are Jews!"
  - The best analogy I can think of is that of Mormons in today's society. They live moral lives, but scandalous stories abound. All of which leads to distrust.
- Torture
- Imprisonment.
- Finally, an earthquake, freedom, and the jailer is brought into the community.

We could spend time unpacking each of these points and consider the historical, the theological, and the allegorical contexts and implications of what is going on. (And there is a much longer version of this sermon that does just that).

But, I think the place to focus this morning is this - About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Paul and Silas had a long, rough day - an arrest, a trial, beatings, imprisonment. Paul is not presented as superman in Acts, just a saint. Sometimes, in the midst of the kind of day he had in Philippi, he would invoke his Roman citizenship, and threaten legal repercussions. Sometimes, he would say, "I am a pharisee, the son of a pharisee" and sow confusion in his accusers. That day he simply allowed it to happen with no recorded defense. But at the end of the day, Paul and Silas were together as members of the body of Christ, in unity - praying and singing. That unity, I think, is what draws the other prisoners to listen. And in the end saves a life.

In Revelation, we see another kind of unity - we see everyone wanting the same end. We as Christians - look towards that end. We say versions of it during Eucharist - "until his coming again", "Christ will come again." "We await his coming in glory;" "*as we await the day of his coming.*" "awaiting his coming in glory;"

That is what we look towards, its our future. And the church says in unison with Christ - The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come.

The Gospel this morning is a prayer of Jesus. There is nothing unusual about that. We are a people of prayer and the prayer book because Jesus was a person of prayer - he talked prayer and he lived prayer. These verses are the last part of a longer prayer he prays on Holy Thursday. Jesus has been praying for his disciples, saying things like - "And I am no longer in the world, but <sup>o</sup>they are in the world, and <sup>h</sup>I am coming to you." But now the focus of the prayer changes. Jesus starts to pray for his disciples, and for those that join the community of faith afterwards. He was praying not only for Peter, and James, and John - but for Paul, and for Silas, and for Luke, and for Timothy, and for you, and for me.

And what was his prayer for us? That we be holy? Father make them holy, like we are holy? For power? No, it's for us to be one - like he and the Father are one. Let's take a minute and think about that. Unity like the unity of the Trinity. A unity so deep, a mystery so profound - we have a hard time expressing it. I know that in seminary we spent a lot of time in theology classes defining what it is not.

But Jesus prays that we as Christians have the same interconnectedness with Him and the Father and with each other. Its an interesting concept, and what that the church held as sacrosanct. Unity was so important in church history being seen as someone who was schismatic was the worst thing you could be.

For the Christian unity is centered in Christ. Its not simply being nice to people. It flows out of the fulness we find in him.

May we find that unity this morning. Amen.