

Bible Study
Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year C
May 8, 2016

[RCL] Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26

Acts 16:16-34

The story may be a familiar one: Paul sets a slave girl free of the spirit that possesses her. He does so because of his own annoyance with her acting as a nonstop herald for him and Silas. This doesn't sit well with the slave girl's owners and even ends up landing Paul and Silas in jail. The earthquake comes and leaves them an avenue of escape, and indeed sets all of the prisoners free. What's surprising, though, is that they don't seem to leave. They're still there when the jailer sees his own predicament, and are able to stop him from taking his own life in despair, and as a result of this, he and his entire household are baptized.

- What might it mean that Paul and Silas and the other prisoners did not leave when a way out was provided?
- Are there moments in your life when you've felt like the jailer?
- When have you seen God at work and marveled?
- When have you felt like your life had been saved?

Psalm 97

Psalm 97 exalts God as the one who brings justice to the world. God's majesty is so great that the coastlines rejoice, God's adversaries are consumed in fire, and even the mountains are so humbled that they are said to melt like wax. The earth trembles before God's glory, yet Zion and Judah rejoice in God's judgments. The righteous have nothing to fear, we're told, their lives are protected and they are able to rejoice in God; for God loves those who hate evil. God's majesty is described in terms terrifying and awe-inspiring, and this awe leads directly to praise and thanksgiving.

- What are the ways in which God inspires awe in you?
- What does it mean today to hate evil?
- How do we discern God's justice?
- How might God's justice differ from our own sense of justice?

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

In this text from Revelation, the angel speaks to John the Divine the words of Jesus. This passage is full of rich imagery which we often make use of in our tradition, though sometimes without exploring fully. Jesus refers to himself as the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the root and descendant of David, the bright morning star. After hearing these descriptors of Jesus, all who are thirsty, all who desire the water of life are bid by the Spirit, the bride (an image often associated with the Church), and everyone who hears to come and drink. This, John is told, is a gift; this is the same way it's described a chapter earlier when John is told that the one seated on the throne is making all things new. The passage ends with Christ's promise that he will come again soon, and a fervent wish that it will be so.

- What does thinking of Jesus as Alpha and Omega, as the root and descendant of David, or as the bright morning star tell us about Jesus?
- How can these images enrich our understanding of who Jesus is and what he means?

- What are the ways in which we thirst?
- What are the ways in which the water of life can quench our thirst?
- How can we wish for Jesus' coming again without losing sight of the here and now?

John 17:20-26

In this famous prayer from John's Gospel, Jesus prays that his followers, both the disciples and those who come to follow Jesus after them, may be one just as he and God are one. This unity is evidenced in the glory and in the love which God gave to Jesus, and which Jesus gave to his followers. This prayer takes place right before Jesus' betrayal and arrest. He prays for unity at a time when even his inner circle is about to be divided, for glory as he is about to suffer condemnation and shame, and for love as he is about to be despised.

- What must it have taken for Jesus to pray this prayer in light of what is to come?
- What are the ways in which we as Jesus' followers could be more unified?
- How can we share the glory and love that Christ shares with us?

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