

Sermon for the Seventh Sunday of Easter  
May 29, 2022  
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney  
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church  
Los Alamos, New Mexico

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

Living God, Mystery of love given and received before all foundations,  
You wound our hearts, hardened to division and indifference:  
Deepen our yearning for unity and enrich our love for diversity  
That the whole creation might share in your communion;  
Through Jesus Christ, who makes known your love. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

It is a sad end to Eastertide.  
We celebrated the Ascension of the Lord on Thursday  
amidst the tears for the slaughtered of Uvalde.

We are left at a loss in our sadness and incomprehension.  
We are left with questions and no answers.  
What are we to do?

It is something we share with the disciples.  
They, too, at the Ascension are at a loss to know what to do

Though Luke says they were joyous, I venture to suggest  
any joy was tinged with sadness at the second loss of their leader.

---

<sup>1</sup> Year C Collects, Easter 7, *Prayers for an Inclusive Church* by Steven Shakespeare; Church Publishing Inc., New York, NY, ©2009; page 95.

So we stand looking at the sky.  
Hoping the clouds will grant us the gift of rain  
to wet the ground with more than tears.

The disciples are stunned.  
They can't see Jesus any longer,  
but they keep staring at the sky.

Then these two guys in white robes show up.  
“Pardon us, but what are you looking at?”

The disciples don't answer,  
but I can hear them grunting, “Dunno.”  
So, the guys in the white robes tell them:  
“He's coming back just like he went off.”

I remember once when I was probably 8 years old.  
My mother was driving us home from visiting her mother.  
It was about a 30-mile drive from Bedford to Brownstown.  
I think I was eating a banana when I saw her leaning forward.  
She stretched over the steering wheel looking up through the windshield.  
I figured she might be looking at a plane.  
My dad was a pilot with the National Guard.  
And he often circled around our house.

“What you looking for,” I asked her.  
“I'm looking for Jesus,” she told me.  
“He's coming back,  
and I just thought this might be the day.”

My mother felt a deep connection with Jesus.  
She thought of praying as talking with God.

Admittedly, we don't usually get an opportunity for Dialogue with Jesus  
like Paul did on the Road to Damascus.

Or have a conversation like St. John the Divine,  
with whom Jesus spoke directly:

“At the end of the visions I, John, heard these words:

"See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me,  
to repay according to everyone's work.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last,  
the beginning and the end."

Blessed are those who wash their robes,  
so that they will have the right to the tree of life  
and may enter the city by the gates.

"It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you  
with this testimony for the churches.

I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come."

And let everyone who hears say, "Come."

And let everyone who is thirsty come.

Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon."

St. John listened to the voice that unveiled the truth for him.

Apparently, the slave girl in Philippi did not ignore the voice that kept telling her

“These men are slaves of the Most High God,  
who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

The author of Acts tells us that this harangue goes on for several days  
until Paul becomes so annoyed he turns to the girl and demands  
that the spirit of divination to “come out of her.”

Now why do you think Paul is so annoyed with the girl?

She is following them around

and directly defining the message the apostles are proclaiming.

Could it be that Paul is annoyed that someone else is the center of attention?

Or might Paul and Silas be concerned  
that she might draw too much attention to them in this Roman colony,  
where followers of the Way would not be welcome.

She will not let up and it most assuredly became tedious and upsetting.

I know I generally avoid those individuals I encounter  
who are walking down the street swearing to themselves  
and having animated monologues and conversations with no one in particular.

But there might be a different explanation.

The author tells us that this slave girl is used by her owners  
to make money with her fortune telling.

She is enslaved.

She has no freedom or agency.

For days she has been an unending reminder of the injustice she is suffering.

Slaves were to be silent and invisible,  
like furniture,  
ever-present to anticipate the needs of their owners.  
They were not human beings.

But this enslaved girl refused to be silent.

And often,

when oppressed people refuse to be silent,  
people with the power to do something about that oppression,  
who don't really want to deal with it,  
get very annoyed.

And so, when the annoyance is great enough,  
they act – as does Paul:

“I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.”

Now Paul may have freed the girl,  
but that was just the beginning of troubles for him and Silas.

The pair of Apostles are accused of what today would be called “restraint of trade.”

The Apostles are whipped and beaten and imprisoned.

It is ironic – here Paul and Silas free an enslaved girl only to be enslaved themselves.

It is a further irony

that an earthquake provides the opportunity for them to escape and they stay put.

This ironic turn of events provides the Apostles with a unique circumstance

– to save the jailer from suicide

and to welcome him and his family,

and presumably the other prisoners,

into the household of God.

Irony again that slavery and imprisonment

bring freedom to so many diverse individuals

to join in the collective of God’s kingdom.

It is ironic also that we often pray on Sundays for the unity of Christ’s church

– even though we are so divided in our opinions and doctrines,

and too often focus on what divides us rather than what unites us.

It’s been estimated that there are:

33,000 different denominations in the United States and

45,000 different denominations worldwide.

Why?

I remember a story Garrison Keillor told on *Prairie Home Companion* years ago.

It seems Ole, Keillor’s oft regaled foil,

was shipwrecked on a desert island for a number of years.

When rescuers finally came to Ole’s aid,

the old Swede insisted on showing all his handiwork.

As they toured the island, Ole guided their attention to various buildings.

“This is my home.  
This is my workshop.  
This is the community center.  
This is my guest quarters.  
And this is my church.”  
As they walked back to the shore,  
one of the party saw a building in the distance.  
“What’s that one over there.”  
Ole looked and shook his head.  
“Oh, Well That’s the church I USED to go to.”

We are called to build up the Kingdom of God.  
It just means that our unity apparently comes as a matter of diversity.  
We’re not all the same  
and we are not called to be the same.

The Kingdom of God is as diverse as creation itself.

But we are reconciled by the Love of God in Christ.

In John's gospel, Jesus says:

"The glory that you have given me I have given them,  
so that they may be one, as we are one,  
I in them and you in me,  
that they may become completely one."

God has given the glory given to Jesus to those who follow Jesus.  
Jesus is in us, just as the Father was in Jesus.

God in us; we in God.  
There is no separation between God and us.

The voice of God may be heard from anyone (or anything) in creation,  
because the glory has been passed on to all creation.

If there is any answers to the questions we ask  
about the pain and suffering in the world,  
about the senseless slaughter of the innocents;

Those answers may come from unlikely sources.

We just need to listen.

We must share the love of God in Christ.

We must flood the world with love to drown out the hate.

In the words of Bishop David Reed of the Episcopal Diocese West Texas:

“Ignore the cynics, and pray with all your heart.  
Let your cries reach to the heavens.  
Let your anger and despair be your prayer.  
And listen to God answering in return.  
Look for God’s tears revealed  
and listen for his perfect and righteous anger.  
Give yourself over to opportunities  
to join in the Spirit’s work of binding up and healing.  
Love with all you’ve got,  
and never, ever surrender to the darkness.”<sup>2</sup>

At our Baptisms,  
We, each of us, or our parents,  
were called to turn from the darkness,  
to embrace the light,  
and to share the love of God  
with the world.

I ask you to turn to page 304 in the Book of Common Prayer  
and join me in reaffirming your Baptismal vows  
in the light of the Resurrection and Ascension.

---

<sup>2</sup> Pastoral Letter to the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas, the Rt. Rev. David Reed, May 24, 2022.

*Celebrant* **Do you believe in God the Father?**

*People* I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

*Celebrant* **Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?**

*People* I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

*Celebrant* **Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?**

*People* I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

*Celebrant* **Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship,  
in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers ?**

*People* I will, with God's help.

*Celebrant* **Will you persevere in resisting evil, and,  
whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?**

*People* I will, with God's help.

*Celebrant* **Will you proclaim by word and example  
the Good News of God in Christ?**

*People* I will, with God's help.

*Celebrant* **Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons,  
loving your neighbor as yourself?**

*People* I will, with God's help.

*Celebrant* **Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,  
and respect the dignity of every human being?**

*People* I will, with God's help.



I will – with God’s help. Don’t forget that last part.

As it says in the Scriptures:

“Take my yoke upon you.”

That doesn’t mean bearing a cross alone.

The yoke of Jesus is a double yoke,  
which means the burden we carry is shared by another.

“My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

We are called to bring action into our lives.

That’s the funny part about the disciples,  
standing there,

watching Jesus ascend into the heavens.

They were so awestruck by the flight,  
that they forgot to do what they were told:  
get to work.

And that’s what we often forget.

We’re not supposed to stand around looking up into the clouds

Looking for my father to fly over

Or watching for the return of Christ:

We’re supposed to get busy

so that when Judgment Day comes,

the guys in the white robes will have to tap us on the shoulder and say,

“the man wants to talk with you.”

Let us pray:

All praise and thanks to you, most merciful Father,  
for adopting us as your own children, for incorporating us into your holy Church,  
and for making us worthy to share in the inheritance of the saints in light;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you  
and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**