

Bible Study
Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year C
May 1, 2016

[RCL] Acts 16: 9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22 - 22:5; John 14:23-29

Acts 16: 9-15

Hospitality in the first century Roman Empire was risky. It was not simply inviting someone over for dinner or even offering them a place to stay for the night. Instead, it carried with it an offering of protection and provisions for the journey ahead. It signaled a commitment to enter into permanent relationship with another. A family would offer hospitality to people like them, social equals who could be trusted to reciprocate when needed.

So it is significant that throughout Acts, the apostles receive hospitality from people who are not like them, including Gentiles and businesswomen like Lydia. The power of the Holy Spirit explodes the dividing walls between strangers and knits them into a community of friends and co-workers for the spread of the Gospel. After Lydia and her household are baptized, she urges the apostles to stay with her and provides for Paul and Silas after they are released from prison (Acts 16:40).

- Where have you seen the Holy Spirit create surprising community?
- What are the dividing walls separating people from each other in your neighborhood?
- Lydia and the apostles were open to God's Word and their lives were radically changed. What practices help you stay open to the Word?

Psalm 67

Psalm 67 is a communal song of petition and praise, calling on God to bless Israel so that the whole world will know the Holy One's justice, power, and guidance. We see this in the symmetrical structure of the psalm. Verses 1 and 7 begin with a petition for God's blessing, while verses 2 and 6 concern the earth. Verses 3 and 5 are identical, and our attention is drawn to verse 4, the only three line verse in the psalm: "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide all the nations upon earth." God's blessing is not just for Israel, but for the whole earth. The petitions voiced in this song are universal rather than contextualized.

- Given the world as you know it today, what might these blessings look like?
- Where is God's saving health needed?
- Where is God's justice and guidance needed?
- Using Psalm 67 as a model, write your own song of petition and praise, being as specific as possible.

Revelation 21:10, 22 - 22:5

The book of the Revelation to John is addressed to "the seven churches that are in Asia" (Revelations 1:4) and was written in the second half of the first century C.E. The beginning chapters of the book describe the various challenges those churches are facing, from imprisonment and death to spiritual complacency. John exhorts these Christians to "be faithful until death" (2:10b) and to be persistent in seeking a transformed life (3:18-20). Life in the

Roman Empire held out visions of many different objects of worship, including multiple gods and the emperor. In Revelation, John records larger visions, reminding the churches of God's sovereignty.

This particular passage offers the promise of the new Jerusalem, where God's glory is the only light needed and the nations will dwell together in safety and wholeness. When the lectionary leaves out many verses, I like to find out what is missing. In this case, the compilers omitted several verses describing the new Jerusalem's opulent walls and gates. Take the time to read these verses. Imagine the vision John is describing—a glorious city more radiant than anything the Roman Empire could construct.

- How does this city, the river, and the tree of life appear in your imagination?
- Which aspect of John's description offers you the most powerful sense of hope for your life, your community, or the world?
- How might you live into that hope with faithful courage?

John 14:23-29

Jesus's words to Judas (not Iscariot) are part of a larger conversation at the Last Supper. Jesus is preparing his disciples to live faithfully after he has gone from them physically. They are understandably disturbed by this talk, but Jesus repeats his words of peace and assurance. Jesus has brought them into an abiding love relationship with God that has implications for their lives whether they are in Jesus's physical presence or not.

The Advocate, the *paraclete*, is the Holy Spirit, sent to abide with the disciples (14:17) and to remind them of Jesus's words and teaching. He is not leaving the disciples orphaned (14:18), and yet we can imagine how upsetting this conversation would be.

- Jesus's promise of the Holy Spirit and his gift of peace are intertwined. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit's abiding presence in your life?
- Where do you sense a need for Christ's peace today? Take a few moments to pray for peace now.

Written by Charlotte Wilson

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