

Easter 6C
Readings: Acts 16: 9-15

The Rev. Dr. F. Darcy Williams @ Emmanuel Chestertown
Psalm 67
Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

22 May 2022
John 14:23-29

Our lessons today place us in an interesting place of juxtaposition. Our Gospel lesson is part of Jesus' farewell discourse. He knows that he will soon leave his disciples. Jesus has spent the last weeks of his public ministry preparing the disciples for his death and ascension into heaven when he will be reunited with the Father. His message is one of love and encouragement. But it is also a farewell message and leaves his disciples in that state of not really understanding what is going to happen. The texts today create conflicting feelings for us. Whereas in the gospel Jesus is preparing his disciples for his leaving them and ultimately his death on the cross, all of the other readings reflect joy and growth. Placed here in our liturgical year, when we are still in the Easter season with the Feast of the Ascension coming this week, followed by the Feast of Pentecost in 10 days, our Gospel lesson takes us back to the night of the Last Supper. We find ourselves caught between the joy of Easter and the memories of Jesus' last days. Caught between the cross and John's vision of heaven in Revelation. Caught between the last days of Christ's life on earth and the early days of the church as told in the Acts of the Apostles. Caught in an in-between world of leaving the past behind as we move into the future, but knowing Jesus is walking with us.

In our own lives we find ourselves confronting the paradoxes of life in 2022. Our daily news headlines are filled with stories of rising consumer prices and falling stock market portfolios. On the political front, Congress begins to show signs of working together, and then most things seem to fall apart along partisan lines. After 2-plus years of the COVID pandemic, when many of us are vaccinated, boosted and were beginning to feel reasonably safe, COVID infections have spiked again. Just when we thought we could safely go without masks, masking-up seems to be the most sensible and caring thing we can do.

Last Saturday our community celebrated Justice Day continuing the hard work of racial reconciliation. At the same time, an 18-year-old man brought terror and death to Buffalo NY when he opened fire in a busy supermarket, killing 10 and wounding 3 others. All but 2 of the victims were black, targeted by a young man whose online postings before the shooting were filled with hate and bigotry toward the black community. We struggle with how to make sense of all of this, and how to find our way when there seems to be no way. We feel like every time we take 2 steps forward, we also have to take one step back. On the one hand, we long to go back to the days of youthful innocence and simplicity where everything could be cured with a parental hug or a kiss. Yet on the other, we know that it is only when we work together loving as Jesus taught us to do that we will find our way, and our steps forward will far exceed those steps back.

So we turn to our scripture to guide us. In our first lesson this morning we hear the story of Paul taking his teaching to Macedonia and spreading the church in Philippi with the baptism of Lydia and her whole household. In the psalm we ask God to bless us as we praise God for all the wondrous deeds he has done on behalf of all the peoples. In the Epistle we hear about the new Jerusalem, that holy city lit by the glory of God and flowing with the water of life. It is the city where the gates are never shut by day and there will be no night. In the gospel that we hear the message of God's peace, of Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit and his words of comfort: "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." It is part of his promise of new life

in the kingdom of God and God's promise to be with us always as our companion, our guide, our hope and our strength.

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus tells us he is the Way, the Truth and the Light. That he is one with the Father, and that the love that is shared between Father and Son is also shared with us. He promises us his peace, the peace which surpasses all understanding, giving us what the world cannot give us. He gives us union with God, promising that those who keep his word, those who follow his teachings, those who open their hearts to God, will find God dwells in their very being.

We see this happening in the first lesson today from Acts as we hear about Paul and Silas who after preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ in Syrian Antioch, decided to revisit every city where they had started new communities of faith. After traveling back through parts of what is now southeastern Turkey, Paul has a vision calling him to Macedonia, now part of northern Greece. From there he traveled to Philippi where he met Lydia and other women who though they were Gentiles worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As Paul and Silas told them about Jesus and his message of love, compassion, service and peace, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, were baptized. Soon others came to hear them preach. Word spread about these men who spoke out against oppression, and any form of domination of others by those in power, and many were baptized. Through Paul's words and work, the Light of Christ shone brightly in the hearts of those who listened. His listeners found a new way of living, one that involved caring for others, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, healing the sick and lame, sharing their gifts with others.

We too are called to this new life in Christ. We are gathered here together and called to get through this thing called life together, helping each other on the way. Each day is a new day in this journey of life, a new day to make a difference and to be a blessing to others. Some days are easy. Some are not. But each is blessed by God .

On this new day, as we step into the future together, I offer this Celtic blessing prayer to you in the name of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit:

*The world is now too dangerous and too beautiful for anything but love.
 May your eyes be so blessed you see God in Everyone.
 Your ears, so you hear the cry of the poor
 May your hands be so blessed that everything you touch is a sacrament.
 Your lips, so that you speak nothing but the truth with love.
 May your feet be so blessed you run to those who need you.
 And may your heart be so opened, so set on fire, that your love, **your love**, changes everything.ⁱ*

ⁱ From *The Black Rock Prayer Book* as found on The Celtic Christian Tradition (<https://www.facebook.com/CelticChristianTradition/>)