

Acts 16:16-34

The Rev. Anita Schell-Lambert

Psalm 68:1-20

Sunday, May 16, 2010

Revelation to John 22;12-14, 16-17, 20

Easter 7C

John 17:20-26

Emmanuel Church, Newport, RI

“We are a dynamic faith community committed to sharing God’s love. Our mission is to equip people to live as disciples of Jesus.”

On this seventh Sunday of Easter, we stand between observance of the Ascension and the day of Pentecost, as the readings for today remind us once again of our new life in the Risen Christ. The Gospel passage concludes the series of readings from Jesus’ “farewell discourse” (Jn 13:1-17:26) with his “high Priestly Prayer (Jn 17:1-16). As the prayer begins, Jesus’ “hour” has come, as he asks that he might glorify God and promises eternal life for all. Jesus prays for his immediate disciples to be protected and unified in the Father’s name and assures them that they will be protected and with him.

In the conclusion to the prayer, the Lord’s intercessions extend beyond those with him on that final night to include future disciples. “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word...” (vs. 20). He also prays that they all may be one as Jesus and the Father are one. The solidarity of the disciples will enable the world to believe that Jesus is indeed the one whom the Father has sent. Hmm, I wonder if we, like those first 12 disciples really believe our parish mission statement – that we are equipped for service – that we have all that we need for our ministry in this world. Perhaps Jesus sensed that his disciples might need lot soft preparation for being equipped for service, o he began his goodbye early.

How do you say goodbye? For Jesus, preparing to leave the close society of his disciples seems to have been a long process. Almost from the beginning he gently, or sometimes in exasperation, explained that the course his life was following would lead to profound changes in their lives. So he began saying goodbye early.

When families get together to say farewell to someone moving away, or to celebrate the last few days of someone's single life before marriage, or when someone is in the final stages of his life in this world, they often rummage around and get out old photographs. These pictures stimulate an extended round of reminiscence – where holidays were spent, the worst car journey. ...Before an impending change, people tend to reflect more than usual on how they got to where they are. They are preparing to say "Goodbye."

Jesus' final conversations before his arrest are prime family gatherings. One member is reminiscing about where family members are now and how they got there. Look how these memories fit in with what I have been saying to you, Jesus says. Remember that I was always with you but that soon I will be with you in a different way. Say goodbye to the old way.

When a girl who can tell fortunes starts following Paul around as he goes to prayer in Philippi, shouting that these men are servants of God and have come to tell the citizens how to be saved, Paul loses his temper and tells the spirit that gives her this insight to come out. That meant no more fortune-telling, no more payments to her masters from people desperate to have some control over their futures, or at least to see them coming. They would have to say goodbye to all of that.

Maybe Paul was annoyed that his well-argued intellectual persuasion and the witness of the disciples' own conduct was overshadowed by this girl's act. How can people change their lives and make an important commitment on the basis of a parlor trick? Unthinkable. As a consequence, the slave girl has to say good-bye to her old way of life, to the extra favor that her fortune telling brought her. She stops being "the slave girl who tells fortunes" and becomes nearer to being herself – not to the task she performs but the person that she is. We don't even know her name. Afterwards she fades from the story.

She may have had to say goodbye to being of some importance in society, but she also needed to welcome a new

future. We don't know if she acted on her insight into Paul and Silas's mission and became a follower, but the jailer did. He threw all his eggs into one basket and brought his whole family into the family of the baptized. It was an immediate and complete rejection of the old life and an embrace of the new. There was great joy in that household, but also a release from fear, the fear of failure that would cause a family man to attempt to take his own life. The fear that would make people want someone else to tell them what was going to happen in their lives, and no doubt also tell them what to do and who to pay to change any unpleasant predictions. The jailer's fear was replaced by a trust in God. *A Forward Day by Day* quotation of a few years ago still hits me like a 2 x 4 with its compelling wisdom. It reads, "A sign of God's will is that we will be led where we did not plan to go." When I look back on those events, the article continues, "I see God's hand in them. When I was able to put my trust in God, I was led where I did not plan to go but where I definitely needed to be. Thanks be to God!"

The Gospel writer John thought that it was important to remind those who had never met Jesus in the flesh that Jesus was still present, but in a new way. Not in the way that he had been, but in a real way, in an immediate way, in the constantly forming community of believers reflecting the oneness of Jesus with the Father in their own relationship with Christ. They were invited to accept the love of God in fellowship, just as Jesus accepted the free flow of love with the Father.

It's like a family settling down for one last celebration of "now" before they move into the future, with the advantages of knowing themselves better and knowing who is going with them into the future. (From *Christian Century*, May 29, 2004, 18 by Amanda Wright.) So, let us contemplate all that Jesus gives us in the conclusion of this long goodbye, ending today with the high priestly prayer. May we trust God this much even as Jesus was telling his first disciple one last time that with God and through Jesus and the Holy Spirit we are never alone or comfortless. May the following final words from a powerful little track,

“Acceptance,” remind us of our need – yes, our need – to put all our trust in God and Jesus, as Jesus reminded his first friends, one last time – this final Sunday of Eastertide. I conclude with the words of Vincent P. Collins from “Acceptance.”

A very wise old Scotsman used to put it this way: “As long as I insisted on driving, I ran into trouble. After the last crackup I said to God: “O.K., You drive it!” since then I have been riding in the back seat enjoying the scenery. I place myself completely in His hands every morning and say, “Thank you, Lord!” every night. And that’s it.”

In praying, we must remember that “Father knows best.” Suppose, for instance, I think I ma about to lose my job? Should I pray? What should I pray for? God may have ordained that if I did not pray, He will let nature take its course and I will lose my job; if I do ask Him to save my job, He will. However, with greater faith I may pray, “Dear God, do what is best for all concerned.” In turn, He may permit me to lose my job, only to get a better one. I have nothing to lose by leaving it up to Him. After all, He can’t possibly do a worse job of running my life than I have myself!

We all are inclined to make the mistake of thinking that the few minutes we spend in actually talking to God are all that count. In reality, the attitude of mind we maintain throughout the day is every bit as important. If you place yourself in God’s hands in the morning, and throughout the day you hold yourself ready to accept His will as it is made known through the circumstances of your daily life, your attitude of acceptance becomes a constant prayer.” May we trust God this much even as Jesus was telling his first disciples one final time that with God and the Holy Spirit we are never alone. This is our prayer of trust, unity and love. AMEN.

*Acceptance: The way to serenity and peace of mind
Christian Century, May 29, 2004, p. 18 by Amanda Wright.
Synthesis: Easter 7- Scripture, May 20, 2007*

