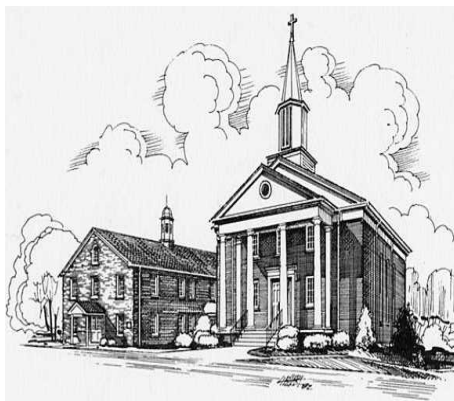


The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Year C
RCL



- Acts 16:16-34
- Psalm 97
- John 17:20-26

The Collect

O God, the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us, and exalt us to that place where our Savior Christ has gone before; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

Acts 16:16-34

with Paul and Silas, we came to Philippi in Macedonia, a Roman colony, and, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magis-

trates, they said, “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and

was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

Psalm 97

Dominus regnavit

1 The LORD is King;

let the earth rejoice; *

let the multitude of the isles be glad.

2 Clouds and darkness are round about him, *

righteousness and justice are the foundations of his throne.

3 A fire goes before him *

and burns up his enemies on every side.

4 His lightnings light up the world; *

the earth sees it and is afraid.

5 The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD, *

at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.

6 The heavens declare his righteousness, *

and all the peoples see his glory.

7 Confounded be all who worship carved images and delight in false gods! *

Bow down before him, all you gods.

8 Zion hears and is glad, and the cities of Judah re-

joice, *

because of your judgments, O LORD.

9 For you are the LORD,
most high over all the earth; *

you are exalted far above all gods.

10 The LORD loves those who hate evil; *
he preserves the lives of his saints

and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

11 Light has sprung up for the righteous, *
and joyful gladness for those who are truehearted.

12 Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous, *
and give thanks to his holy Name.

John 17:20-26

Jesus prayed for his disciples, and then he said. “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 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, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

“Righteous Father, the world does not know you,

but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

SERMON

Two Apostles and a fortune teller walk into a bar. The bartender said, “We don’t serve Apostles here”.

The fortune teller said, “I told you so.”

We have a fascinating story from the Acts of the Apostles today. The girl is a slave, but this isn’t a story about the evils of slavery. This is a story of how often we let the spirit of the times compromise the word of God.

The business interests who owned this girl were making a big profit from her fortune telling. If we were able to interview them, they would probably deny that they were doing anything wrong. They had invested their capital in this business enterprise and they depended on the profit from this girl’s work to feed their families and to put a roof over their heads. By the lights of the time, they were doing nothing wrong. It’s very like

the people of our own time who invest in clothing factories in Third World countries which provide jobs for the workers there and cheap clothing for us here. If we were to question them about it, they, too, would protest that they are doing nothing wrong.

But, then Paul and Silas rolled into town and start meddling. Before they were done, they'd wrecked everything for everybody. Paul and Silas were flogged and thrown in prison. That's what always happens when you roll into town and start meddling. Things turn ugly, quick. Forty-six years ago this last week, students at Kent State University were protesting our involvement in what they saw as a tragic, unnecessary war. Troops of the Ohio National Guard opened fire on the students. Four dead in Ohio. Indeed, the list of people who have been beaten, injured and killed for pointing out the sins of a society seems endless. Gandhi in India. Mandela in

South Africa. Those on the receiving end of the fire hoses in Birmingham. Martin Luther King, Jr., even Jesus. The expectations of God for his people are bad for any enterprise which measures its success by any standard other than the standard God has set out for us.

Well, why did Paul and Silas start meddling in the first place? What is this girl saying that annoys Paul so?

While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days.

There is some deep water here that we must avoid if we are to understand this story. At first blush, it would seem that having a famous local soothsayer follow you around proclaiming God would be a helpful thing, but it was not, because she was not. We’re in Roman Europe, not in Judea. The culture is Roman and “Most High

God” to a Roman meant Zeus! No wonder Paul was annoyed!

Paul did not turn an angry face to the child and swear at her that she was being an annoying little brat. He addressed the spirit within her,

But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

The name of Jesus Christ had exorcised the spirit associated with Zeus from the girl!

Restoring the girl to wholeness, though, impacted her owners’ pocketbooks, and they reacted as power always does – with violence. This is how you can tell that you are not living in God’s Kingdom – if you think of violence as the last effective resort, you are not living in the Kingdom.

Now, which is more important, restoring a person to

wholeness, or maintaining property rights? To the people of the time, protection of life as they knew it was the more important consideration.

The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely.

This is the place I step into the shoes of Paul and Silas and start meddling because we're in it up to our necks. We ship jobs to Third World countries because they make goods more cheaply, and we need cheap goods because we don't have good paying jobs here. If we were to interview the owners of the businesses who ship jobs overseas, I suspect that they would answer the same as the slave girl's owners, "I didn't do anything wrong. If I don't do it, my competi-

tion will.” The problem isn't individual greedy business owners. It is a global economy which has gone over to the dark side by valuing profit over people. How are people of faith to respond?

In 1911 there was a deadly fire in New York at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. One hundred forty six people died. The country was horrified and as a result, legislation was passed protecting workers from unsafe conditions and the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union was formed to protect the lives of sweatshop workers. In other words, the people of the time perceived rightly that the spirit of the times, driven only by profit, had become demonic, if you like. It had departed from its prescribed vocation to serve the public good, and had failed in its holistic calling to be aware of all costs – particularly the costs to God's children who were in the power of the owners of the sweatshops. The

subsequent legislation and the formation of a union were the way the people of the time chose to restore the spirit of their times to something nearer to that which it should be.

Christians are not called to go through life protesting that they didn't do anything wrong. They are to go through life proclaiming the Gospel – the Good News – that it is possible to do positive good and that means exorcising the demons which have infected our world – the demon of profit over people; the demon of fear of others; the demon of personal ambition at the expense of others; the demon of vengeance.

“When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?”

Those are not my words. Those are Eleanor Roosevelt's words. On Mother's Day, we would do well to

heed the words of this First Lady, and I would add to them. “When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than to profit from it?” When will we factor in the costs of human suffering before we bank our gold? If the spirit of the times are unchanged, if we still calculate the costs of production by refusing to acknowledge the suffering imposed upon God’s children by the demand for cheap goods, we are in it up to our necks.

If I were to suggest that we need to disassemble the system from which our thirst for cheap goods is slaked you would rightly claim impotence. I cannot unwind the serpentine Gordian knot which is the global economy, and neither can you. God does not require of us that which we cannot do. He requires of us what we can do. As Paul and Silas sat, confined within the belly of the beast, they did what they could do – they sang and

prayed. That may sound to you like a pretty lame response but after the earthquake, when the jailer asked what he must do, they told him,

“Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

The message here has nothing to do with heaven. It has to do with living out the promise of the Kingdom here and now by doing what you can do in faith that God will act to restore balance to His Creation. It has to do with a decision to live in the Kingdom now.

I want to shake you, church! I want to shake complacency from you. I want to shake willing blindness from you. I want you to confront the evils upon which our comfort is so often built. I want you purposefully to be aware of where the clothes you buy are sourced, and the conditions under which they are produced and I want you to refuse to cooperate with systems that are

offensive to God's word, no matter how tempting the cheap prices are, for that is what **you** can do.

Each Sunday we pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It is our responsibility to bring that about, just as did Paul and Silas, by doing what we can do. We are God's people, and God's people are not free to live contrary to His instruction:

**He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? ¹**

It is our responsibility as Christians to speak truth to power. When power acts unjustly, when the desire for profit extinguishes kindness, when power sees itself as its own god, then it is Christians who must speak. Go ye and do likewise, church.

¹ Micah 6:8

AMEN

BENEDICTION

I was in Kroger's this week, shopping for Kathy. I noticed two rows of automated check-out machines. Each of those machines represents a laid-off cashier. If we asked management about that, I suspect they would respond that they are doing nothing wrong; they're just keeping costs low so that the prices stay low, but each of those machines represents a child of God who has no income, and if a child of God, then Jesus Himself.

Jesus prayed for his disciples, and then he said. "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Eleanor Roosevelt once asked:

“When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?”

As we remember our mothers, let's also remember the selflessness that characterized everything they did for us and ask with Mrs. Roosevelt, “If not now, then when?”

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

Sermon Copyright © 2016 J. Stewart Schneider
