

**The Lessons Appointed for  
Use on the  
Sixth Sunday of Easter**



Year C  
RCL

Acts 16:9-15  
John 14:23-29  
Psalm 67

**The Collect**

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### Acts 16:9-15

During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman

named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us.

Psalm 67

*Deus misereatur*

- 1 May God be merciful to us and bless us, \*  
show us the light of his countenance and come to  
us.
- 2 Let your ways be known upon earth, \*  
your saving health among all nations.
- 3 Let the peoples praise you, O God; \*  
let all the peoples praise you.
- 4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, \*  
for you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide all the nations upon earth.
- 5 Let the peoples praise you, O God; \*  
let all the peoples praise you.
- 6 The earth has brought forth her increase; \*  
may God, our own God, give us his blessing.
- 7 May God give us his blessing, \*  
and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe of  
him.

**John 14:23-29**

Jesus said to Judas (not Iscariot), “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Fa-

ther, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.”

## SERMON

In a piece in Christianity Today<sup>1</sup>, Rev. Dr. Sam D.

Kim, writes:

**Christian apologist Os Guinness says that when we look at evangelicalism today, it is the world and the spirit of the age that are dominant, not the Word and Spirit. The church in the U.S. is strong numerically, but weak because it is worldly. The church in America is in the world and of the world; and as a result, it is in profound cultural captivity.**

Dr. Kim has put his finger on the sore spot – The church in America is in profound cultural captivity.

What does that mean?

If I say the word “God” I’ll bet you a nickel that everybody gets an image in their minds of an old white guy on a throne – someone who looks like us only bigger and more powerful. If I say the word “church” I’ll

1 [https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2019/may/church-today-in-cultural-captivity.html?fbclid=IwAR3XZnT4-Fuq2PYJvM8SXf82Ai3\\_jxBgrTOkhVCVQM-LM6wSlvvylCQ\\_OFVY](https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2019/may/church-today-in-cultural-captivity.html?fbclid=IwAR3XZnT4-Fuq2PYJvM8SXf82Ai3_jxBgrTOkhVCVQM-LM6wSlvvylCQ_OFVY)

also bet that you get an image of something very like the room we are in now, just more filled with friends and family than we see today. Those are our shared experiences, our cultural understandings of things like God and church, the world and the spirit of the age in which we live. Any suggestion that “God” or “church” might be something different than our cultural understandings meets resistance, sometimes violent resistance as we are seeing today. That’s what Dr. Kim’s means when he says, “The church in America is in the world and of the world; and as a result, it is in profound cultural captivity.” Let’s look at a profoundly different world – the world of Paul and his companions.

When we begin our story today, Paul doesn’t know it, but he is about to begin a journey which will result in the new church’s first European disciple, Lydia of Thyatira. That raises an almost insuperable question: How



does one transmit the story of the life, death and resurrection of the Christ to a people with no understanding of Jewish religious practices? For a thousand years the Jews had been a people apart, living by laws that were unique to them and most unattractive to the peoples who lived near them (think circumcision, for instance). How is Paul supposed to spread the news of the miracle which has occurred within the Jewish culture to the whole world? What obligations should be imposed on the Gentiles who responded? Particularly, must Gentiles undertake the Mosaic Law, including circumcision? It was a heated debate. To settle it, there was a meeting, called the Council of Jerusalem, about the year 50. In the end, it was decided that Gentile Christians were not bound by the Levitical ceremonial regulations.

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.<sup>2</sup>

When we pick up the story, the meeting has been held. The decision has been reached, and a letter drafted setting out the decision. Paul and Barnabas, along with Judas Barsabbas and Silas, were to take the letter to Antioch, which they did. Judas Barsabbas and Silas then left on a missionary journey, but Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch for a time.

Let's think about that for a second. How come? The preparations for taking the good news into the Gentile world have been completed. All is in readiness, but Paul remained in Antioch. After a time, he suggested that he and Barnabas retrace their steps rather than moving beyond them. The way is clear before them, but Paul turns

<sup>2</sup> Acts 15:29

back to his preferred pew. He wants to sit and stay. Sounds just like us! That's when some surprising things happened.

After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Come, let us return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul decided not to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and set out, the believers commending him to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Notice that Paul is doing good work, strengthening the churches. It's just not the good work he is supposed to be doing. Rather than extending the reach of the church, Paul continued in familiar territory.

They went through the region of Phrygia and Gala-

tia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

And that is where we find him in our first lesson, in Troas, stubbornly NOT going into Europe.

During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

Macedonia is in Europe, a radically different culture than that to which Paul is accustomed. It’s no surprise, then, that Paul is drawn, as are we, to the comfort of familiar rituals and friendly faces who understand their relationship to the Most Holy in similar ways. Paul’s vision is drawing him to far-away countries and to people who have no understanding of the foundations of the

faith from which Jesus sprang, but his humanity is drawing him to his accustomed pew and to less challenging people. Paul's choices were the same as ours. Paul went to Europe and met Lydia. It was a strenuous, dangerous journey, but he did it. I don't want to make anyone mad, but it seems to me that too often, church in our time has subtly shifted from being a place from which you were sent out to a place in which you sit down.

Christians are not called to be like other Christians. They are called to be like Christ. Paul made the wrong choice, and was redirected. My friends, Mike and Elaine, spent two years as missionaries in China and my cousin, Mary Lib, went to India, but we are not all called to heroic journeys. Rather, the question must be, "How can we free the church from its profound cultural captivity? How can we state the reality of the risen

Christ to those we meet in ways which frees Christ  
from cultural captivity?”

AMEN

## BENEDICTION

The goal of the early church was to go into the world to make disciples. Very often, the goal of church in our time is to provide a safe place to hide from the world. The churches have in many ways become episodic; we put on a good show and excel at drawing interest, but we lack life change and transformation. We've got cooler and more dapper, but not any deeper. We should recall that the 120 in the Upper Room in Jerusalem brought an entire empire to its knees.

If we only know a God who is compliant to our every whim, he cannot be the God who carried a cross to die on Calvary. He is instead an abstraction made by a church in profound captivity. We are not called to be like other Christians; we are called to be like Christ.

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

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

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