

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year C

May 16, 2010

Acts 16: 16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17: 20-26

### **Acts 16:16-34**

*{16}* One day, 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. *{17}* 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." *{18}* 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. *{19}* 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. *{20}* When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews *{21}* and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." *{22}* The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. *{23}* After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. *{24}* Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. *{25}* About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. *{26}* 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. *{27}* 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. *{28}* But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." *{29}* The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. *{30}* Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" *{31}* They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." *{32}* They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. *{33}* At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. *{34}* 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**

*{1}* The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! *{2}* Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. *{3}* Fire goes before him, and consumes his adversaries on every side. *{4}* His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. *{5}* The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth. *{6}* The heavens proclaim his righteousness; and all the peoples behold his glory. *{7}* All worshipers of images are put to shame, those who make their boast in worthless idols; all gods bow down before him. *{8}* Zion hears and is glad, and the towns of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O God. *{9}* For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. *{10}* The LORD loves those who hate evil; he guards the lives of his faithful; he rescues them from the hand of the wicked. *{11}* Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. *{12}* Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!

### **Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21**

*{12}* "See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. *{13}* I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." *{14}* Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.... *{16}* "It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." *{17}* The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.... *{20}* The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! *{21}* The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

### **John 17:20-26**

*{20}* "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, *{21}* 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. *{22}* The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one,

as we are one, {23} 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. {24} 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. {25} "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. {26} 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."

Today's first reading from the *Acts of the Apostles* picks up from where we left off last week. You may recall that it was a story about Lydia, who, along with her household, became the first convert to the way of Jesus on the European continent. What most fascinates and captivates me about that particular story is the seeming element of "chance", "randomness", or even "happenstance". According to the story, St. Paul and his companions had other travel destinations in mind, but were thwarted on two occasions from carrying out their plans. They wound up in Philippi only in response to a sketchy vision or dream of St. Paul. While in Philippi, it does not appear they had any clear plan in mind, but were on their way to a "place of prayer" for Sabbath observance, something routine and ordinary. There they encountered Lydia, a woman of wealth and influence, who became a convert and then invited Paul and his companions to stick around for a while.

Based on what we heard today, it appears they took Lydia up on her offer and were still in Philippi, though still not with much of a plan. Once again, St. Paul and Silas are on their way to the "place of prayer", to all appearances minding their own business, when they crossed paths with a strange and annoying person who decided to hang around for a few days, shouting all the while. It looks like "plan A" for Paul and Silas was to ignore her and hope she would go away. When that didn't work, St. Paul "very much annoyed", lost his temper and his patience and put "plan B" into effect. Now, I'm convinced that we get the "polished" version of that event: "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." In my version, St. Paul, who had finally just "had it", turned around and said something like: "Oh, for Christ's sake, shut up and beat it!"

Not much of a plan, but the story didn't end there. In fact, certainly in the Gospels and frequently throughout *Acts*, strange and marvelous things occur when someone, no matter how troubled, just "shows up" along the way.

The citizens of Philippi thanked St. Paul and Silas for the successful exorcism of sorts with complimentary accommodations in the city jail. Apart from not being able to sleep and having an all night prayer vigil, they did

not appear to have any plans, but, as it turned out, God did. The shackles were miraculously broken. My guess is that this was God's way of saying: "Hurry up guys and 'high tail' it out of here before someone notices." So much for God's "plan A". But, whether it was out of stupidity, fear, or concern for the jailer, that Paul and Silas stayed in the jail, God had a "plan B". The jailer and his household wound up being the second household converted.

What does all this say to us? Personally, I find it very comforting and encouraging that God was not stopped by two folks, who, to all appearances, seemed to be "flying by the seats of their pants" and pretty much figuring it out as they went along.

So many times, when it comes to ministry, and to much of our lives really, we sometimes wait for the "big event", the "moments of clarity", "the smooth path", the "five year plan", or the "sure thing". There's nothing wrong with that unless it blinds us to the fact that ministry and life are happening all around us all the time, even when we think we are just "fumbling along". Sometimes the opportunities are quite ordinary, sometimes unexpected, and sometimes even a little odd. We won't always get it "right". But that doesn't stop God.

Last week I mentioned Luther's *Small Catechism* and I want to end with something from it today as well. It's from the explanation of the "second and third petitions" of the Lord's Prayer.

Your kingdom come.

*What is this?*

In fact, God's kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also Come among us.

Your will be done, on earth as I heaven.

*What is this?*

In fact, God's good and gracious will comes about without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come about in and among us.

That's exactly what Jesus' prayer for His disciples was on the night before His death and what His prayer remains for us even today.

Thanks be to God!

AMEN.