

Bible Tuesday for the 6th Sunday of Easter, 2019

Acts 16:9-15

⁹During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."¹⁰When 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. ¹¹We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and 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. ¹³On 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. ¹⁴A 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. ¹⁵When 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.

Macedonia under Roman Rule, and at the time of the book of Acts, consisted of modern day Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, Serbia, and Kosovo. Macedonia would have been almost exclusively populated by Gentiles, peoples conquered by Rome. While Peter was struggling with his notions of "God/Yahweh is the God of the Jews. God's son, who brings salvation, brings it only for the Jews," Paul and his companions are traveling around the Mediterranean Sea, evangelizing to mostly Gentiles.

This passage contains some fascinating "historicity." Scholars believe that the same person who wrote the gospel of Luke also wrote the books of Acts. The style, vocabulary, teachings about Jesus and introductions are the same in both books. In addition, "Luke the physician" is mentioned by other New Testament books as traveling with Paul on at least one of his missionary journeys as his attending physician. In the above passage, note verse 10. The write says, "When he had seen the vision, *we* immediately tried to ..." This use of "*we*" only occurs for a little while in the book of Acts, a strong indication that the author traveled with Paul for some of the trip but not all of it. For this reason, many scholars believe that Luke really did write the gospel named after him and the book of Acts. It was common in the ancient world for books to be named posthumously after someone, even written as if from that person's perspective. Scholars think that may be the case with three of the gospels and even a couple of the letters attributed to Paul, but note Luke or Acts.

Because of the Jewish tradition of taking ritual purification baths in moving, (aka: flowing or living) water, in villages where very few Jews lived, too few for a synagogue, on the Sabbath, in good weather, the handful of Jews would worship by the local river or stream. This worship would not have occurred on Friday night, but rather during the day on Saturday. As Paul travels into a new place, he generally went first to proclaim the gospel to whatever Jews might in that area. If they accepted the news that Jesus bar Joseph of Nazareth was Lord and Savior, then he continued to work in that Jewish community and teach them to evangelize to their Gentile neighbors. If the message of Jesus was rejected by those Jews, then Paul went straight to the Gentiles.

In this case, Paul, Luke, and their companions found a group of Jewish women, among them Lydia and her household. In synagogues and in the Temple, men and women would worship God in separate areas, or with a screen between them. In this case, with no building in which to worship, the women were apart from the men. Fascinating that Paul and his companions did not go off to find the men but stayed and preached to the women.

Lydia is a truly remarkable example of a Jewish woman in New Testament times. Scholars believe that Jewish women were not allowed to represent themselves in society without a man to speak for them and make legal contracts. Yet, Lydia is described as a merchant with her own household! She is an upper class woman, much higher in Roman societal status than Paul, a tent making religious official. She offers hospitality to this itinerate Pharisee/Christian and his companions and THEY ACCEPT! Jewish men were absolutely not allowed to even talk to single women directly but these guys were going to stay at her house! The gospel of Jesus is re-ordering societal structures and the relations of the baptized and the pagans, men and women, people of different classes!

Psalm 67

¹May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah

²that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.

³Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

⁴Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Selah

⁵Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

⁶The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.

⁷May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him.

The first line of this psalm is a quote of the blessing God told Moses to have Aaron say over the people of Israel whenever they gathered. Jewish rabbis and cantors, and Christian priests and pastors still say this blessing over the people of God all over the world. "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace." The above passage is not spoken by the priest, but by a layperson praying for this blessing for himself and others. Why does the psalmist ask for this blessing? So that all the nations of the world know God's saving power and come worship God with the people of Israel! Does Yahweh really care about these non-Jewish nations? The psalmist says, "Yes! Because God judges all peoples with equity and guides all nations!" How will we know if God is blessing us? When the fields and mines give up their harvests, the vineyards and orchards their fruits, the waters their fish, and the flocks and herds their offspring. Since all peoples of the world receive these things, God obviously blesses all people.

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

¹⁰And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. ²²I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory

into it. ²⁵Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²⁴through the middle of the street of the city. On both side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

The above passage is a description of a vision that John of Patmos is given about the New Heaven and the New Earth. The battle between God and evil has already taken place; evil was quickly subdued. God and the lamb quickly bring about the new heaven and earth that Jesus promised. In the above pericope, verses 11-21, which describe the appearance of the New Jerusalem with rich imagery, are skipped.

The Rapture, a doctrine developed by American evangelists in the 1800's, describes a time when God will pull off from earth all the righteous people and leave all the evil people to give them more time to change their evil ways. The Rapture is believed to be one of the last things God will do before God ends the earth. The righteous people will then join God in heaven, no longer suffering evil and the unrighteous on earth. Many Pentecostals, Bible Churches, and Evangelicals, as well as some Baptists, believe in the Rapture. But in the above passage, the righteous are not pulled up from the earth but rather a new order descends from heaven down to earth. Whereas the Rapture teaches that righteous humans will be taken up into heaven, in Revelation, God leaves heaven and "makes his home" among all the people in the New Jerusalem, the renewed holy habitation into which all peoples, tribes, and languages are called to live forever.

This vision shows over and over again that God is the source of life in this new earth/Jerusalem. No sun or moon is needed because eternal daylight emanates from God and the Lamb. How will Jerusalem get water, a conundrum for Jerusalem from the time before David all the way through to King Hezekiah? Now God does just have his footstool in the Temple, but rather God, himself, dwells in Jerusalem and the river of life flows right out of God's throne! God has taken the tree of life out of Eden and replanted it, straddling the river of Life, where it grows fruit all year long, a different fruit every month, and has magical leaves which are medicine for all people. No evil or darkness of any kind can exist in this new order where all walk in the purifying light of God always.

John 14:23-29

Jesus answered him, "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. ²⁴Whoever 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.

²⁵“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But 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. ²⁷Peace 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. ²⁸You 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 Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

It surprises me that the scholars and theologians who developed the Revised Common Lectionary, (that is, laid out the three year cycle which says what Bible Lessons will be read every day, including Sundays,) did in their wisdom only give us Jesus’ answer and not the question Jesus is answering in the above pericope. Please allow me to fill you in so that Jesus’ answer makes sense.

Jesus is in his Maundy Thursday discourse, the very long sermon Jesus gives the disciples and apostles gathered for the Last Supper. This is Jesus’ last shot at teaching and encouraging the disciples before he is crucified. He has a lot on his mind, including, “In my Father’s house there are many mansions...”, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you...”, and responding to Thomas’s demand to “Show us the father and we will be satisfied.”

Among those very familiar passages is this lesser known one, the first verse of the above pericope. “Those who love (agape) me will keep my word (Logos: promise, intention, teaching, will) and my father will love (agape) them, and we will come to them and pitch our tent among them/in their camp.” In this passage, agape means to be loyal to, to be in a state of fidelity with. Logos, a word with many and varied meanings, in this passage refers to the fact that Jesus expects his disciples to embody the fulfillment of his promises to the world. Jesus’ death and resurrection mean nothing to the world unless the world knows about them and God’s freedom and love that they bring. But how can these frightened, soon to be leaderless disciples carry out this mission? “My father and I will pitch our tent in their camp!” God lives in and with us!

“Peace I leave with you” – Peace is a translation of the Hebrew “shalom”. Jesus isn’t referring to peace as the absence of war or even as a quiet mind and heart. Shalom means, “contentment, satisfaction, satiation, in right relationship with God and humanity.” This is not Buddha sitting under the bodhi tree in the bliss of enlightenment either. Shalom is a lack of fear, anxiety, and stress. It is a trust in God that is in the core of our being and radiates calm into every aspect of life.

Lord, grant me such peace, and make me an instrument of your peace...