

John 17:20-26
May 29 Easter 7

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, this is the last Sunday of Easter, and it's kind of a strange day in the Church year. This day literally marks the in between time – in between Jesus ascension back into heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

After the ascension, the Apostles sat around without Jesus physically present and without the Holy Spirit spiritually present. Acts tells us that the apostles hung around Jerusalem anxiously waiting for the Holy Spirit for come, for 10 days. Can you even imagine that? 10 days. That's a week and a half.

Now, we know that the Holy Spirit first came for us on Pentecost, but the apostles had no idea when the Spirit would show up. No one did for that matter, aside from God. So, the apostles just went about doing what they usually do – including getting together on Pentecost - a Jewish feast day that commemorates the giving of the Torah to Moses.

When the Holy Spirit finally did show up, that must have been really exciting! And we'll get to that next Sunday, but today we remember that the apostles had no idea when or where the Holy Spirit might show up. So, they just went about doing their daily routine, praying and waiting, expectantly, only knowing what Jesus had promised them.

So, for 10 days they were just waiting, not knowing that it would be 10 days. What do you do when you are waiting? When you know something is going to happen, but you just have no idea when. Like being in DIA during a blizzard. You know it will open at some point, but you just don't know when.

Typically, I'm pretty easily distracted. I go chase squirrels all the time, which gets me into trouble, just try going shopping with me. Sometimes I even miss meetings that I am supposed to be at. Even this last Thursday I missed the alarm going off on my phone to remind me of a meeting. Luckily that meeting had to be canceled, so it wasn't too bad, but I still felt horrible for forgetting about it.

So, I have to wonder. If I were an apostle back in the year 33, what would I have been doing? Probably getting lost in town somewhere.

But, at least the apostles had the community. Everyone was in town waiting for the same thing, and according to Luke-Acts they were going about their normal activities, including showing up for the big Pentecost worship service. What else they were doing we don't know, but I wonder if they kept walking around asking – now?! Is it now?! I would hate to miss it.

But, the thing about the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit always shows up at the right time, in the right place, and always in community. When we are one with God and one another, as Jesus hopes we will be, the Holy Spirit shows up, right where we are, in order to bring freedom to the captives.

In the reading we have from Acts today, you'll notice just how busy the Holy Spirit is setting all of the captives free. All of them.

First we have the girl who was held captive by other people, she was a slave, and she was also held captive by a fortune telling spirit. We could also say that she was held captive by the economy as well, because people paid to hear what she had to say. That's a trifecta of captivity!

It is only as Paul and Silas walk through town that she is set free from two of her captors - the people who own her and the economy as she proclaims to the whole world who Paul and Silas are, for free. No one has to pay her to hear that they are slaves of the most high who have come to set everyone free, for free!

And here we get a bit of irony. The slave girl is telling the truth about freedom.

Now, you might think that Paul would be happy to have affirmation coming from this girl and the fortune telling spirit. It should drum up business, right? But Paul instead gets annoyed and casts the spirit out of her, thereby setting her free from the spirit and the economy, including the people who had taken possession of her.

Has it ever occurred to you that the Holy Spirit may work through our negative emotions? It is only when Paul is annoyed that he finally sets the girl free. And, we have to wonder, what was Paul annoyed at? Was he annoyed with her constantly sharing their good news? Or was he, more likely, annoyed at the system that had made her captive in the first place? Christ, after all, is all about setting us free.

Paul probably knew that if he set the girl free there would be ramifications for him. This is the same Paul who has been beaten up and imprisoned and nearly killed on a number of occasions for preaching this good news of salvation for all people.

And yet, here he is again, taken as a prisoner for setting others free. Well, he is a prisoner of the most high after all.

But, the story doesn't end there. We can see that the Holy Spirit was just getting started and has bigger goals in mind. There is more going on than just setting the one girl free. So, once again, God uses Paul's imprisonment to set others free, physically testifying to the fact that if Christ makes you free, you are free indeed – literally – and nothing can hold you captive.

And so while Paul and Silas are locked up for freeing the girl, singing and praying, testifying to others in the prison of who God is, the Holy Spirit shows up again to set everyone literally free from their prison cells. All the doors were open and all of the chains were unfastened.

And then there is another instance of freedom. The prison guard knew he was responsible for all of the prisoners. He knew that he would be killed for letting everyone go free, so he decides to kill himself. Totally distraught, he sees nowhere else to turn. It's hopeless.

And then, once more, the Holy Spirit uses Paul to set the prison guard free, the one who was holding others captive, and not just him, but all of his family as well. In the darkness Paul cries out, "Do not harm yourself, for we are here!" In the dark he yells, "Do not harm yourself. We are here with you!"

Community. In the darkness, in community, the Holy Spirit is at work.

"Do not be distraught, for God cares for you and God wants you to live, and live abundantly!"

Set free from all of his fear, the guard is then able to set Paul and Silas free from the prison, and then he asks how he can be truly free. He asks, "How can I be saved from all of this ugliness around me?"

Paul and Silas tell him – just trust on the Lord Jesus. Just trust in the resurrection. Just trust that God is on your side and is working among us.

Healed he then brings healing to Paul and Silas by treating their wounds. Healed, the whole house turns from the death of empire to putting their trust in the God of creation and resurrection, which leads to a whole new way of living. Life in community with the God of healing, wholeness, love, compassion, and forgiveness.

Darkness does not have the final say. Light does. Jesus Christ is the light of the world and no darkness can overcome him. And so we are called to shout out in the darkness and bring salvation to the hurting world.

In the Christian tradition, we talk about living in the two kingdoms. For us, we live under the laws of the United States, and Colorado, and depending on where you live Elbert county and perhaps Elizabeth. That is one kingdom. And. We also live in God's Kingdom, simultaneously.

As we live here in our own neighborhoods and towns, we also live in God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom of grace and mercy. God's kingdom of restored relationships. God's kingdom of resurrection.

Usually our two kingdoms synch up pretty well, but every once in a while the two kingdoms come head to head, and it is in those moments where we proclaim where our true allegiance lies, with the Kingdom of God. Christ crucified and risen is our ultimate king, the only one to whom we answer.

So, putting our trust in God, not people and the empires they form, we take sides with the hopeless and shine light on oppression.

After Paul and Silas' intervention, the prison guard was able to live in God's Kingdom, over and against the injustices of Roman rule. And it is in God's Kingdom that he and his entire family were able to rejoice, because they had been set free – free from the fear of Rome, free to live in a loving community, free to share their healing in a broken world.

In the Holy Spirit, they were set free. And the Holy Spirit is still on the loose today, here and now, showing up when and wherever it is needed, in and among us as a community, in order to bring true freedom, healing and resurrection, into this broken world.

We are citizens with the saints in the Kingdom of God, and we never know when the Holy Spirit will show up where we are and use us for the wellbeing of others.

So, what shall we do while we wait upon the Holy Spirit?

Let us trust God and pray for all the ills we encounter. Let us proclaim God's news of love to the world. Let us sing of God's great mercy.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God.