

Sunday Thought

22nd May 2022 Sixth Sunday of Easter

Readings

Acts 16: 9 - 15
Psalm 67
Revelation 21: 10,22 - 22:5
John 14: 23 - 29

Ready for the Next Thing?!

It's five weeks since Easter! Has the thrill and excitement of Jesus' presence and power – the hope of a living church and a changed world begun to fade? If so, today's readings are the remedy – It's just two weeks to Pentecost! That was Jesus' reply to Jude's question in the Upper Room conversation following the Last Supper the disciples shared with him. The Passion drama had begun and there were so many questions. Jude, otherwise known as Thaddaeus, is distinguished from Judas Iscariot for obvious reasons, one being they probably shared an interest in Jewish nationalism and the Zealot party. Believing Jesus to be *Messiah*, Jude was impatient for the inauguration of the *Kingdom of God*. So, his question is understandable. *'Lord, we know and believe your words, but if you are leaving us, how will we get your message across to the world without you?'* Perhaps, Jesus' reply was even harder to grasp just then. *'The Holy Spirit'*, he replied!



In a few weeks these early believers would have passed through the traumatic, heart-wrenching events of the Cross and the incredible, amazing spectacle of Jesus' resurrection and ascension. For now, they had to hang on to his promise to return to them in the power of God's Spirit, - to learn basic faith in his *'You ain't seen nothing yet! Get ready!'*

In various personal ways we shall, with the whole church across the ages, have come to know that when we cry out from our deepest dilemma, *'How, Lord?'*, his answer is, *'God! The Holy Spirit!'* Or more simply, *'Put me at the centre of your life! When that is true, the Holy Spirit will make my teaching clear to you, bringing to mind the words the Father spoke through me. Then you will get ready for God's next thing in your life by trusting me and you'll have my peace enveloping you all the way.* If we are still bewildered by this, Jesus goes on to put it even more simply. *Love me! Put me first! Live by my words! Trust me for the next thing my Father has planned for us!* It's all a matter of letting the Holy Spirit take over that next thing.

That was Paul's experience on his missionary adventure which features in today's reading. He was travelling together with Silas and young Timothy now. After a difference of opinion – which was reconciled later – Barnabas had taken Mark with him on a separate mission to his home territory of Cyprus. Many times on this journey, Paul would have cause to ask, 'why?' and 'how?'. Why was he prevented by the Spirit from travelling East into Asia. We surmise the reasons. Whether it was the wrong time of year for the journey, or Paul's health problem, or local advice, it was in fact the Holy Spirit taking over. He was guided to Troas and that very first night he received a visionary call from Macedonia. Arriving in Phillipi, a leading city in the Roman province, he discovered a small Jewish community, mostly women who met for prayer at the riverside. Chief among them was Lydia, a prosperous and influential business woman. She had dealt in the fabulously expensive purple cloth produced in her home city of Thyatira, using renowned dyes extracted from a special mollusc shell and from the madder root. Lydia and the whole household of her extensive property, became believers. Paul and his companions were invited to stay and the first church in Europe took root under the care of a woman leader. Paul, with the love of Jesus at the centre of his life and work found his hesitating questions answered when he surrendered to the Spirit of Jesus for his next step. That did not mean everything was plain from then on. There were more questions a few days later – in the city gaol!

If all that has not revived our gospel enthusiasm, look at another excerpt today from John's vision of heaven. John, full of the grace of Jesus, like Paul, writes, '*The Spirit took control!*' He saw a vision of the fulfilled Kingdom of God which Jude had longed for. Recalling illustrations from the prophet Ezekiel, he describes it in symbols of light, glory, and the glittering wealth of nations. Beware, of course, the difficulty of putting spiritual truth into today's words and pictures. We could soon have an image of a city with very low energy bills, no locks or safety alarms, no need for street cleaners, or for a church!! The city represents a person. God! surrounded by worshippers. From the main street flows the river of life. On its banks stand trees with leaves for the healing of the nations. Let's not worry about the detail. Just catch the vision – the next and last thing which Jude had longed for. Us too? How? Let Jesus be centre of everything! *Lord, bring it on!*'

A Prayer for the Kingdom of God (with Psalm 67 in mind)

Lord! We pray for the whole world to hear your words and share your loving mercy, peace and healing. Keep a vision of your Kingdom alive in our hearts, in our thinking and our daily living. Give us courage, with faith and love, to accept your next step for us towards making a world of mercy, kindness, joy and justice, in which all its rich harvests are appreciated, cared for and gracefully shared.

