

Ginny Sunde

Peace Scholarship Recipient

June 2, 2019

Easter 7C, 2019

Acts 16:16-34

In our readings today, the one from Acts caught my eye. We heard of Paul and Silas spreading the word of God. Demonized and beaten for freeing a slave girl of her possessed evil spirit, they were imprisoned. Instead of losing will during this difficult time, they turned to God and the lessons they had been taught. Their prayers were heard and their shackles were undone. The guard, upon seeing this, thought of killing himself, rather than be punished for his failure. Begging his own prisoners for salvation, Paul and Silas answered "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

After what they had been through, Paul and Silas had every right to lose hope or become angry. Yet they still only thought to forgive and save a seemingly hostile person from despair. After all they had been through they only wanted to help others.

That type of determination is difficult, but I have seen here that it is genuine.

For my confirmation project, our Confirmation class of five decided to build a tiny house for the Seattle homeless community. It was an ambitious goal, and we knew it wouldn't be easy. We made envelopes containing tea and Bible verses for this congregation and had 2x4s sitting on the patio, and called on you to help us. I had always known Peace was special, but when many of you made donations, showed up for hours in the summer to hammer away, or even gave us a warm word of encouragement, I truly saw what a dedicated and caring group of people I'm lucky enough to know, and how important it is to help others, even though it might not always be the most convenient thing to do.

Going back to our reading - Although the prison guard was saved, as far as I can tell, the slave girl, though freed of the evil spirit, was left physically enslaved by Paul and Silas. As motivating as this story may be, it also serves as a reminder that there are many, such as women in Alabama and many other states, Muslims, Jews, people of color, and LGBTQ people whose oppressed existences are not acknowledged. But we should try, as Paul and Silas did with the guard, to find common ground.

Anyway, I know that the desire to see a better society exists and I can draw on this lesson to help motivate myself and others. I don't plan on ending up in prison, but I know I will find myself in many exciting, stressful, difficult, and unfamiliar situations next fall when I enroll at the University of Washington to study engineering, and hopefully international relations.

I already got a start on looking to God during difficult times, like this morning when, in typical high school fashion, I started this sermon. And I know that when I'm pulling an all-nighter or seeing something I think is wrong, I can draw on all the lessons and values I've learned here to help get me through.

But thank you to everyone, especially my family, pastor Erik and Nicole, for your constant support, kindness, and for giving me a really wonderful community to be a part of.

Amen.

Noah Marx

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John 17:20-26

Good morning. I'd like to take a minute to talk about today's gospel reading. It's the final section of Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper, dealing mainly with his hopes for his friends because he knows that his life is about to change forever. This passage deals with the idea of the oneness of all believers, and it speaks of the expectation that the disciples will go and tell the world all about Jesus' message and live their lives with God guiding them.

The part that really resonates with me is verse 25 where Jesus alludes to that unknowable portion of God which we cannot see:

“Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you;
and these know that you have sent me.”

We cannot comprehend God's divinity, his all-encompassing love, or his plan for all things, but here in this verse Jesus reminds his disciples that even though they can't hold all of the cards and even though things might seem doubtful here He is.

Jesus is himself the proof. Such is God's love that he came to live with us as a man and experience the world in all of its ambiguous good and definite evil and even as everything fell apart and he was killed on the cross that love was there. To be a believer is to give God that hope and trust, that in the end even as incalculable and seemingly distant as He may be we occupy a special place in him.

In this passage Jesus makes clear that God's love for his son extends to all of us and we go on to truly see this with his death, where when things seemed their darkest, when Jesus' disciples saw him betrayed and executed and God would have the most reason to seek vengeance, he didn't.

Such is his love that instead we received his sudden, miraculous grace. We may not be able to know him in all his glory but his love for us is clear and we can put our faith in him.

All of history is filled with crisis but we live in a time where unprecedented disaster looms over us.

It is becoming increasingly clear that human greed and pollution is making our world, entrusted to us by God, unlivable. The poor and weak abused, animals dying out, water tainted, the ice melting, and it's looking like as carbon levels rise our crops are gonna have a much harder time growing.

Now more than ever is the time to let that trust in God guide our actions. Even as this crisis seems so vast and unsolvable God's message is to try and solve it anyway. Even as Jesus knew he would be tortured and crucified he proceeded and in the end, in the face of that human darkness God's light triumphed. Sudden, miraculous grace.

Be God's grace in this world. Work to save our earth even if it seems at the outset like you cannot succeed because Evil talks a big game, but God's grace and the perseverance to go on will always come out ahead, even if it takes a while. We're playing a long game here.

Amen.

Katharine Menstell

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John 17:20-26

I would like to start with a few words of gratitude. Thank you to Peace and the Scholarship Committee for this amazing opportunity. Thank you to the youth group for helping me grow in my faith while having fun. Thank you to Heather, my confirmation mentor and to Sofia, my personal mentor. Thank you to my family for helping me wake up in time for church and for always giving me the support I needed and that I still need.

We are all beginning new journeys. We are leaving the known environment of high school and entering an unknown world. We are leaving behind friends, teachers, and in my case, my family, as I move over 2,000 miles away. My world will be different, with new friends, experiences, and life lessons. But I know that I have been taught the skills to thrive in that new environment.

In the gospel today, Jesus prays to God knowing that he will be leaving this world shortly. He can only pray that some of us will know his truth and that we can find unity and love amongst ourselves.

The way this is written is unusual: the community of Christians, the readers of the text, are being discussed, but not addressed. Rather than a commandment or a parable, Jesus simply prays that his work has been enough; enough to ensure a great future for his followers.

This idea of creating a movement or a legacy is one I have spent quite a bit of time pondering this year. Legacy is a word tossed around often and without a meaningful definition. To me, legacy is not a tangible thing left behind to collect dust. It is something cultivated over time that has grown wonderfully and is equipped to continue flourishing.

Teaching is a form of legacy. Teachers have the ability to give knowledge, memories, and values to their students. They continue their legacy in every student in their classes. My chemistry teachers were the ones who showed me how to be good people. They not only introduced me to the wonders of chemistry, but they set the example for kindness: always offering a smile, high five, or pleasant conversation. They showed me how impactful teachers can be outside of the classroom.

Jesus, in his role as teacher, left a huge legacy. His unconventional method of teaching through storytelling helped to solidify his teachings after he had been crucified. His disciples continued to spread his message and build a community of believers. This community building can be extremely difficult especially when there is pre-existing tension between members. But Jesus' legacy of love has helped Christians throughout time to come together with a common belief.

In my experience, a common belief is not always enough. Differing interpretations, reasoning, and solutions to a problem can all lead to disputes and tension in a group setting. These are the times I have to remember Jesus' teachings. He uses commandments, stories, and prayer to try and help his followers understand what is happening and bridge divides. His legacy of unity continues to improve the lives of so many people today.

Mothers are also incubators of legacy. They raise children and teach them how to live, act, and so much more. Mothers have a huge impact on all of us, and in this passage, we see Jesus in a motherly role. He prays for the people like they are his adopted children, hoping that he has done enough to show them the love of God that is in all of them.

The legacy Jesus is praying for is the same legacy that I hope for as I leave Seattle.

I hope that the people I know will work together and know that I have loved them. It is difficult to imagine leaving not only my school and home but also the home and family that I have in this congregation. I have made lasting friendships here, learned how to be responsible here, and grown in my faith here. All of you have helped me do that in some way, big or small.

Thank you for the legacy you have created in me, and thank you for helping me leave a little legacy as well.

Amen.