

Seventh Sunday after Easter

16 May 2010

Youth Sunday

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

(Connected: 1 Peter 3:14-16)

Why are we here together this morning? Why are you here? Why do you participate in the various ministries and activities here at Holy Comforter – worship services, Christian Formation, outreach projects, EYC and Youth Ministry, Advent and Lenten programs, choir, breakfast, Latino ministries, Tuesday Morning Brunch Bunch, volunteer receptionist. Why are you here? Hold your answers to that question – we'll come back to it.

There is a lot going on in today's first reading for Acts 16, and I hope this story reminded you of another story we heard several weeks ago. Paul and Silas along with others are traveling along sharing the story of Jesus as opportunities arise. Paul casts out a spirit from a girl who was sharing their mission which caused her owners to lose money and power. This of course made the owners quite angry and they sought a way to get revenge – sound familiar? Next thing they know, Paul and Silas are dragged before government officials, accused of breaking Roman law and the crowd is incited to rile up against them – sound familiar? Then comes the beating and imprisonment, including being bound in chains – sound familiar? During this ordeal, an

earthquake causes all the prison doors to open and all the chains to unlock...not just those of Paul and Silas, but of every prisoner in all cells. This sounds remarkably similar in many ways to the Passion of Christ – including the earthquake. Do you remember how at that moment in the crucifixion the veil that separated the most holy place in the temple – the place where only the high priest would enter once per year, on the Day of Atonement, and even then he could only enter after a series of cleansing rituals and wearing the prescribed clothes – Do you remember how that veil symbolized separation between God and humans - because we were so sinful – how that veil was torn in half as Jesus died and the earth shook? Do you remember the disciples being gathered together, singing and praising God, saying “Don’t worry, Lord, we are all here.” No, you probably don’t remember that last part – this is where the stories diverge.

You see, Paul and Silas, during their trials, had the rest of the story – they knew the ending, the Good News...the Gospel. You and I know the rest of the story, and what’s more we have the stories and letters of the disciples and particularly the letters from Paul and the Book of Acts – which is also known as the sequel to Luke’s Gospel.

So I don't know about you, but when I read today's passage from Acts and hear Paul call out to the guard, who is severely distraught, "Don't do it, don't harm yourself, we are all here"...my question is Why? Why man, are you are still there? All the chains are broken, all the doors are open..."Run, Forest, Run!"

So here we are back at the question – Why are you here? (*Ask for scribe and responses. After response, draw cross around and over them*).

All of these reasons are valid. Stick with me here, because I'm about to go off script and share a reading with you that is not part of today's lectionary...and I think I can get away with it because I was raised Southern Baptist – that's my story and I'm sticking to it. *1 Peter 3:14-16* (read from bible...)

Now, if you can remember any stories of Peter, hopefully you remember that he also had some tough times after Jesus' death and resurrection. He was shipwrecked, beaten, imprisoned and ultimately crucified for this faith. Many scholars think Silas had a little something to do with the writings here in Peter as well. So when I hear these few verses from 1 Peter, I'm hearing some

advice from some folks who have lived it...Things will probably not always be smooth. In fact, they will probably get pretty bad sometimes, and you might not always understand it. But...we know the rest of the story, and we can at least keep praising God because God knows the parts of the story we can't see yet – *1 Corinthians 13:12...read from bible.*

So our job is to keep on singing – but not just that...we are charged to be ready to explain to people why we are singing when everything around us is crashing down. What is this thing called Christian hope? Why are we here? We are all here today, but are we ALL here? Are you ALL here? Or to modify the phrase from this year's Annual Giving Campaign, Are you ALL in? But that question means so much more than how much you are able or willing to give from your wallet. How much are you able or willing to give from your heart?

You see, all of these reasons you gave to the question are valid, and they are honest. But when we gather as a community, if the things we are doing are not informing your personal faith and our collective faith as a parish and Christian community, we are missing it. Unless we are doing that – challenging one another

and supporting one another in our faith journey...asking questions (and it's okay to ask questions, and even to change your mind about the answers) – unless we are doing this, we are no different than your book club, your soccer team, your fishing buddies, or your Facebook Group. And this journey thing is messy and sometimes frustrating. Benchmarks that are typically used to gauge performance in the corporate world might not always apply in the church. You see, we are not necessarily called to be successful in the eyes of the world, but we are called to be faithful in the eyes of God.

When I began this journey with you in ministry almost seven years ago, these verses from 1 Peter were the basis for the first devotional we did at EYC. We did it in a similar way, except as answers were given to the question "Why are you here?" I gave each person who answered a piece of a puzzle I had created. They wrote their answer on the puzzle piece and then together, they assembled the poster sized puzzle which revealed a cross colored in with various colors of magic marker to resemble a stained glass window. And at the center of that cross was the word Jesus. When I read the scriptures for today, I couldn't believe that the story from Acts seemed to point back to 1 Peter.

You see, I think the question that I challenged the youth with all those years ago, I think that's still the question as I conclude my ministry with you here at Holy Comforter...

Why are you here? We are all here, but are we ALL here? Are you ALL here? *In the name of the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, Amen.*