

Seventh Sunday of Easter
Sermon text: Acts 16:16-34
Revelation 22:12-21
Date Preached: May 16, 2010

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

How can we remain faithful in the midst of structures that are evil? This is an on-going question for the whole body of Christ also known as the church. It is a question that challenges us to look at our society with a critical eye. It is a question that also takes us beyond the moaning and groaning about the flaws of the world and bids us to speak out against the injustices of the world that keep people subjected to others.

In the reading from Acts, Paul is confronted with an injustice. A woman is being used in order to bring money to her owners. This would be similar to individuals in today's world forced into human trafficking or delivers in drug trading. Even in the midst of such troubling circumstances in her life this slave-girl mentioned in the Acts reading is persistent in identifying Paul and his companions as servants of God.

One would think that this would be pleasing to Paul. Yet, in some way that the scripture doesn't report,

this becomes annoying to Paul. It is a persistent cry for justice that stirs Paul to act.

When Paul does act he proclaims the gospel. It is the Gospel that frees this slave-girl. Out of faith, comes justice. This justice granted the girl is an act of love from God, delivered through Paul.

This text does raise an interesting series of questions for how our faith impacts the daily life of those around us. Do injustices have to become so annoying to us before we act? Do we need such persistence in crying out for justice to overcome our fears of confronting it as well as the consequences that come from acting in just ways?

I am fully aware that justice is not easy. Not every company has policies to protect those who might blow the whistle at work over an employer's unjust practices. Even when such policies are in place, they might not be enough to shield one from the fallout.

So do we speak up anyway? It may be tempting to rely upon our own courage to do so. Yet, there is another way in which we can discover find a greater basis for acting.

Such action finds its root in the love of God for us and for our neighbors. God's love is often thought of as a sheltering love. Yet, God's love leads us into the unpleasant aspects in life not for our suffering but that in those unpleasant moments there is opportunity for us to share the good news that sets people free.

Through the eyes of faith we not only trust God to be with us in the reality of the moment, no matter how bad our circumstances may be at that given time. But we also trust God to use us in being a voice of faith that the Spirit uses to set people free and allow them to come to believe.

In Paul and Silas's imprisonment their singing, their assurance to the jailer of their presence led him to faith. This is what God does with our sharing the songs and stories of scripture and faith. God delivers His people and sets them free, and how blessed are we to be the voices through whom God speaks.

Advocating for justice based on our faith leads us to trust God so deeply that we cling to the promise boldly shared by the Apostle Paul at the end of Romans chapter 8, that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For us as Christians the doing of justice is a reflection of our faith. Our humanitarian aid throughout the world, the establishment of social service agencies, orphanages, rehabilitative services are the larger canvas on which this picture is painted. The specific acts provide the detail of God's love that to us in the moment may seem insignificant and not worth the price, yet tells most clearly what God has first done for us.

Jesus did justice on the cross. Christ declares the sinner free. Christ seals this declaration with his blood, in death and in resurrection.

Justice is the picture that brings God's love into focus in our lives and in the life of the world. Our calling is to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God as expressed in Micah 6:8. For in so doing we discover God walking with us. AMEN.