



The Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 25, 2025

St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR

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

**THE SERMON: “God’s Kingdom... Here
but Not Yet...”**

Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Introduction

Over three years ago the war in Ukraine had just started and many Russians were emigrating out of the country and I told this joke about a group of Russians who signed up for Italian language classes because they were hoping to move to Italy. So, in the class, they obediently repeated the various phrases in unison, like “How much does coffee cost?” Or “Where is the bathroom?” Then, one of emigrants jokingly asked, “I wonder how I would say, ‘Please, provide me political asylum?’” Apparently one of the students was a member of the Russian Federal Security Service (The modern version of the notorious KGB), and he blurted out “What did you say?” To whom, the curious student replied, “Nevermind, I just wanted to know if any of us might be with the Federal Security Service.” Although this is just a joke, there is some reality to it because there’ve been many reports coming out of Russia that dissidents have been detained for speaking out against the government. But, the scary thing is that something similar is happening here in the U.S. when immigrants are being incarcerated under the Alien Sedition Acts of 1798. This strikes a chord with me because, after the Pearl Harbor attack by in 1941, thousands of Americans were incarcerated and placed in concentration camps just because they were Japanese. In a Congressional investigation after the war, there was not one incident of disloyalty among the Japanese. I don’t like to get political in church but I wonder, as a Christian, when should I speak out.

I'm worried because I was a child when my family ended up in one of those camps and children today are being imprisoned.

Revelation 21:10, 22—22:5

I know such actions aren't anything new in history. It's just alarming that it's happening in America today. I wonder when Christians should speak out and act. It reminded me of what the Lutheran pastor, Martin Niemöller, wrote in Nazi Germany, "First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me." Our lesson in Revelation is a reminder that the Roman Empire came for the Apostle John and exiled him to the island of Patmos. We know that he had to write his Revelation in a kind of code because his Roman captors wouldn't permit him to send anything that they might see as subversive. So, the references to the great whore of Babylon is most likely the Roman Empire. But, while many Christians today focus on the apocalypse, John had something else in mind. He wanted his followers to know that no matter how bad things seem to be, ultimately, God is in control. That's why I tell people to read Revelation to the end and to skip all the violent and juicy parts. When we read Revelation in our lesson today, I hope you realized that John wanted Christians going through trials and injustice to know that God is still in control. John's vision is that the holy city descended from heaven without a temple because the temple is knowing that God is present in us. That's what the New Testament is about, That's why Paul told the Corinthians that they were God's temple and why Peter said that we are a holy priesthood. John saw this in his Revelation when he envisioned the holy city descending from heaven. When God is with us, then God is in us and we are God's temple in the world today.

John 14:23-29

When we are God's temple because God dwells in us, then we'll understand what Jesus was telling the disciples at the Last Supper, "... the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not

give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” When God in Christ is in us, we will have God’s peace - a peace that passes human understanding. Many Christians don’t have that peace because the voices of fear or guilt or judgment drown out the voice of the Good Shepherd. That’s why Jesus told his disciples in the first verse of this chapter, “Let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me.” But, we know that, even when the disciples heard Jesus say that at the Last Supper, a few short hours later, they abandoned Jesus at the Garden. Scriptures tell us over and over again that God is faithful even when we aren’t. So many Christians don’t have God’s peace because they just can’t let go and let God be in control. That’s why we learned in Confirmation classes in Luther’s explanation of the Third Article, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ... but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” We can have the faith that gives us the peace that passes understanding if we could just “let go and let God” be in control of our lives. God isn’t like the Russian secret police and looking for us to screw up. God wants us to be free. God wants us to quit listening to those demons who accuse and shame and intimidate us. A few weeks ago, Jesus told his disciples and us, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me...” You cannot save yourself by your own reason or strength that’s why we need a Savior. God will show us the way.

Acts 16:9-15

Even Paul had to learn that. In our lesson in Acts, Paul wanted to go to the province of Asia (pretty much what is Turkey today) but, as our lesson tells us, God gave him a vision of man saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And, that’s why he and Silas ended up in Philippi, a major city in Macedonia. This lesson doesn’t tell us a whole lot except that they met a wealthy and influential businesswoman named Lydia and, after baptizing her family, she invited them to stay at her home. Our lesson doesn’t say much more than that but, in next week’s lesson, we’ll learn that they upset some men who were exploiting a young girl who told fortunes and Paul and Silas exorcized

her of the demonic spirits and were jailed because those human traffickers were denied the source of their exploitation. But, we also know that God used Silas and Paul's imprisonment to lead the jailer and his family to Christ. God works in mysterious ways and, sometimes, through our setbacks and disappointments.

Psalm 67, The Call and The Challenge

That's why this psalm is so appropriate for today's lessons. Even though John was exiled to Patmos and the people in Jesus' time were smothered by Roman oppression and Paul and Silas were jailed for helping a young girl, God was with them and our psalm affirms that: "May God be merciful to us and bless us; may the light of God's face shine upon us. Let your way be known upon earth..." When oppressed people have God in their lives, in some almost miraculous, unexplainable ways, they have a peace and assurance that they will make it through. Even though they know that God won't always make our problems magically disappear, God gives us the strength and courage to persevere. Paul affirms that in his first letter to the Corinthians, "The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, (God) will show you a way out so that you can endure." As our psalm prays, "May God give us blessing, and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe." When God's face shines upon us and even though we may not see justice and integrity in the world now, in God's time all humankind, all nations will be judged with justice and righteousness. So, the psalmist tells us that God's face is still shining even in the darkness. That's why the psalmist is praying, "May God be merciful to us and bless us; may the light of God's face shine upon us... your saving health among all nations... May God give us blessing, and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe." That's why my professors at the seminary said so often, "God's kingdom is here, but not yet." God is the Spirit of Life that blesses us so we will bless others to bring the kingdom closer. God, the Spirit of Life, comes forth from God's throne to increase our faith to bring God's kingdom to impart God's love and light into the darkness of the world.