

May 5, 2013 Communion

Our Scriptures today invite us to dream of the world as it should be. We are called, as faithful people, to step out of our places of comfort and venture into the light of God's love. What will this look like for us?

Acts 16: 9-15

In the earliest days of Christian faith, missionaries like Paul would travel to the cities of the Mediterranean where groups of Jews already lived. Paul had not planned to go to Philippi but was called there in a dream. His first convert was not a Jewish man but, instead, a wealthy Gentile widow named Lydia. Her baptism, and that of her whole household, changed the Christian church forever.

⁹That night Paul had a dream: A Macedonian stood on the far shore and called across the sea, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" ¹⁰The dream gave Paul his map. We went to work at once getting things ready to cross over to Macedonia. All the pieces had come together. We knew now for sure that God had called us to preach the good news to the Europeans.

¹¹Putting out from the harbor at Troas, we made a straight run for Samothrace. The next day we tied up at New City ¹²and walked from there to Philippi, the main city in that part of Macedonia and, even more importantly, a Roman colony. We lingered there several days.

¹³On the Sabbath, we left the city and went down along the river where we had heard there was to be a prayer meeting. We took our place with the women who had gathered there and talked with them. ¹⁴One woman, Lydia, was from Thyatira and a dealer in expensive textiles, known to be a God-fearing woman. As she listened with intensity to what was being said, the Master gave her a trusting heart—and she believed!

¹⁵After she was baptized, along with everyone in her household, she said in a surge of hospitality, "If you're confident that I'm in this with you and believe in the Master truly, come home with me and be my guests." We hesitated, but she wouldn't take no for an answer.

Revelation 21: 10, 22-22: 5

This passage is about the dramatic vision of Jerusalem. It is the dream of a world that is in step with God – a place of openness, righteousness, faithfulness. Most of all it celebrates the conviction of a better future. It is said that this passage inspired Christopher Columbus to set out to explore the "New World."

¹⁰He took me away in the Spirit to an enormous, high mountain and showed me Holy Jerusalem descending out of Heaven from God, ²²But there was no sign of a Temple, for the Lord God—the Sovereign-Strong—and the Lamb are the Temple. ²³The City doesn't need sun or moon for light. God's Glory is its light, the Lamb its lamp! ²⁴The nations will walk in its light and earth's kings bring in their splendor. ²⁵Its gates will never be shut by day, and there won't be any night. ²⁶They'll bring the glory and honor of the nations into the City. ²⁷Nothing dirty or defiled will get into the City, and no one who defiles or deceives. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will get in.

¹Then the Angel showed me Water-of-Life River, crystal bright. It flowed from the Throne of God and the Lamb, ²right down the middle of the street. The Tree of Life was planted on each side of the River, producing twelve kinds of fruit, a ripe fruit each month. The leaves of the Tree are for healing the nations. ³Never again will anything be cursed. The Throne of God and of the Lamb is at the center. His servants will offer God service—worshiping, ⁴they'll look on his face, their foreheads mirroring God. ⁵Never again will there be any night. No one will need lamplight or sunlight. The shining of God, the Master, is all the light anyone needs. And they will rule with him age after age.

Sermon – “Visions of a different/better world”

Barbara Rossing, professor of NT @ Lutheran School of Theology - Chicago (workingpreacher.org) calls the New Jerusalem proclaimed in Revelation.

“a welcoming city, not a gated community... (where) even foreigners are invited to enter into this radiant city”

It is “a vision of hope for the world”

As the Christians endured the oppressive rule of the Romans this promise of God's healing presence and power was an inspiration => they did not give up hope that it could be and it would be different!

If you turn your mind to the story of Paul's unexpected journey to Philippi and the even more unexpected conversion of a Gentile widow... you realize quickly that the world as God intends is radically different from the culture we have forged by our own devices.

Brian Peterson, NT Professor @ Lutheran Southern Theological Seminary, Columbia, S.C.) (workingpreacher.org) points to how incongruous this story is.

It takes place in a city where the Roman Empire is powerful and popular.

Yet it is here, through an unlikely Gentile woman that, “social and cultural barriers crumble, and this corner of the empire is beginning to be changed by God's grace.”

This vision of a better world has made me actually aware of the news:

- Boston bombing
- Arrest of 10 leaders of the Mad Cows gang – mostly African refugees – to Winnipeg.
Garment factory fire in Bangladesh that killed nearly 400 people – an earlier fire is focus of an article in the May Observer.
- Arrest of 2 Canadians in a plot to blow-up a VIA train to New York City.

But the saddest story I plucked on-line comes from the Associated Press. I invite you to ruminate on that story in light of our scriptures.

- About life transformed
- About a welcome for all
- About God's peace and love reigning
- About a vision/a great hope for human cooperation.
This is God's kingdom on earth -> what are we doing to bring it to life right here??

I want to close with a video of a song that goes back to 1970 in the darkest time of racial oppression, urban crime, anti-war activism.

Despairing the state of the world around them Elton John and Bernie Taupin wrote this distinctly gospel-infused song.