

An Abiding Presence in the Matrix of Life

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First Reading: Acts 16:9-15

A vision compels Paul to move his ministry into Greece. There he meets Lydia, an important person in the business community, whose heart has been opened by God to receive the gospel. Her conversion and baptism provide the impetus for the founding of the church at Philippi.

⁹During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. ¹¹We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. ¹³On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

Gospel: John 14:23-29

As Jesus talks of returning to the Father, he promises to send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will teach Jesus' followers and remind them of all that Jesus taught. Even more, those in whom God makes a home will experience a peace that overcomes fear.

²³Jesus said, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. ²⁵"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace 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. ²⁸You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the

Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.”

Acts 16:9-15

Paul has set out on his second great missionary journey. Starting from Caesarea Philippi, he has travelled north to Antioch, then generally northwest through Asia Minor. He, Silas and Timothy have now arrived at “Troas” (v. [8](#)), a seaport on the Aegean Sea.

Now he has a dream, which he understands to contain instructions from God.

“Macedonia” (vv. [9](#), [10](#)) was the Roman province in northern Greece, so Paul is bidden to enter Europe for the first time, to begin spreading “the good news” (v. [10](#)) there.

“Samothrace” (v. [11](#)) is an island mid-way between “Troas” and “Neapolis”, the seaport for “Philippi” (v. [12](#)). Philippi was settled as a “Roman colony” when veterans from a battle in 42 BC were granted land there. Paul visits the Jewish community first; they meet for prayer “outside ... by the river” (v. [13](#)), perhaps because they lack a synagogue building. Gentile women were attracted to Judaism by its ethical standards. One of them is “Lydia” (v. [14](#)): she already worships God; she is receptive to Paul’s message. “Thyatira”, in the province of Lydia in Asia Minor, is addressed by John in Revelation [2](#). She is a business woman, selling luxury fabrics (“purple cloth”). She and her household are the first in Europe to convert to Christianity and to be baptised. Paul and his associates are reluctant to accept her hospitality, but she insists and they accept.

John 14:23-29

Jesus continues to prepare his followers for his departure. Judas, son of James (one of the twelve in Luke’s list of disciples) has asked him: “how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” (v. [22](#)). Jesus answers, but not directly. In the era to come, when the Father and Son come, separation between God and those who love him will no longer exist (v. [23](#)). Loving Jesus implies obeying him. The message Jesus brings is “from the Father” (v. [24](#)); Jesus is his agent. Jesus’ words will be *complemented* by the actions of the “Holy Spirit” (v. [26](#)), who will be “Advocate”, i.e. helper and counsellor to believers. He will cause the disciples to remember (“remind”) what Jesus has said, and help them to understand the true significance of Jesus’ words and deeds (“everything”). Jesus gives to his followers “peace”, (v. [27](#), *shalom*) – a very different gift from worldly gifts. In loving God, we come to know him. If they really knew Jesus, they would rejoice at his coming departure (v. [28](#)). The Father has sent him into the world to do his will, so in that sense “the Father is greater than I”. Jesus

has told them this so that when they see his manner of leaving (“it”, v. [29](#)), they “may believe”.

This passage is part of Jesus’ farewell discourse to his disciples on the night before his death, a discourse punctuated by the anxious questions of his disciples about his impending departure. First Peter (John 13:36), then Thomas (14:5), then Phillip (14:8), and then Judas (not Iscariot) (14:22) ask for clarification about what Jesus is telling them. Jesus has promised not to leave his disciples orphaned (John 14:18). He has promised to send another Advocate, the Spirit of truth, to be with them forever (14:16) and continue the work that he has begun. The world does not recognize the Spirit of truth and thus cannot receive him (4:17), just as it has not received Jesus. Jesus tells his disciples that though the world will no longer see him, they themselves will see him (John 4:19) because he will reveal himself to them (4:21). Then Judas (not Iscariot) asks: “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” (4:22) Our passage begins with Jesus’ response to this question. Perhaps Judas expects that Jesus will give them some kind of secret knowledge, but that is not what Jesus means. Earlier Jesus had spoken to his disciples of the “many dwellings” (*monai pollai*) in his Father’s house, where he was going to prepare a place for them (John 14:2). Now Jesus says that he and the Father will come and make their dwelling (*monên*) with those who love him and keep his word (14:23). In John’s Gospel, “eternal life” begins here and now; it is life in relationship with God through Jesus Christ (17:3). Even while Jesus prepares eternal dwellings with the Father, he and the Father will continue to dwell with his disciples in the present.

It is through the Holy Spirit, the Advocate or Paraclete (the Greek word *paraclêtos* signifies “called along beside”), that Jesus will continue to be present with his disciples. Jesus says that the Father will send the Holy Spirit to be alongside his disciples, to teach them and remind them of all that Jesus has said to them (John 14:26). Because Jesus will be present with them through the Holy Spirit, his disciples need not be anxious. Chapter 14 begins with Jesus’ exhortation, “Do not let your hearts be troubled” (John 14:1). Now again Jesus exhorts, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid,” after telling his disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives” (14:27).

When Jesus meets his frightened disciples after his resurrection, it will be with a greeting of peace (John 20:19, 21). The Greek word for peace is *eirênê*, but this is surely a translation of the traditional Hebrew greeting *shalom*. Shalom signifies more than the absence of conflict; it is a profound and holistic sense of well-being. It is the kind of peace which the world cannot give, but can only come from God. This gift of

peace accompanies the gift of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus breathes into his disciples as he sends them out in mission (20:22).

As Jesus seeks to prepare his disciples for what is to come, he tells them that if they loved him, they would rejoice that he is going to the Father, because the Father is greater than him (John 14:28). It seems understandable that the disciples would not be in a rejoicing mood upon learning that Jesus would soon be leaving them. Jesus tries to reassure them that he is not simply leaving them, but that there is a purpose in his leaving; he is going to be with the Father. Later in this same discourse, Jesus will tell them that it is to their advantage that he is going away, so that he can send the Advocate, who will bring further understanding and be with them always (16:7).

I can imagine that the disciples were still not convinced that Jesus' leaving could be a good thing. Jesus says that he is telling them these things now so that when they occur, they will believe. Indeed, it is only after the resurrection, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, that the disciples begin to understand and believe the words of Jesus (John 2:22; 12:16) and are finally able to rejoice (20:20). The whole of John's Gospel manifests the fruits of the Spirit's work among the disciples *after* Jesus' death and resurrection in deepening their understanding of Jesus' identity and mission.

Thoughts from the Text to CROSS with Life:

- I. How do you understand Jesus' statement, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words....?" Is this about obedience for you...so you have to study, and discipline yourself in the bible and its precepts and then everyday is considered a test on that knowledge level and practice?...and if you pass, "my Father will love them?" OR Is this about growing into a deeper awareness and connection of love with God and who Jesus was? And in the development of that awareness, understanding and experience of shaping my life around the reality of who Jesus was that I find myself being drawn deeper and deeper into a living of life that is defined by Love itself? How do we understand, "Keeping God's Word", then?

- II. How do you define the Holy Spirit and how it does its work? Is it the Jiminy Cricket on your heart's shoulder that keeps you on the straight and narrow – pointing out the bad and chastising you strongly so that you feel urged to do good instead? (BTW, "Jiminy Cricket" [note the initials], was a polite way of swearing using Jesus' name when it was first introduced into the 1937 movie,

Snow White & the 7 Dwarfs. Jiminy was first created in the Italian book from 1883, [The Adventures of Pinocchio](#)) OR Is the Holy Spirit an undefined but definitely real presence that seems to be alongside of my heart/mind throughout life – a sense and desire that prompts me to do, say and live in ways that are shaped by life, love, justice, compassion, forgiveness and hope? Does this presence help slow me down, open me up, balance me, and in other ways offer more gracious ways to see and experience the world?

- III. Where do you find Peace in life? What Kind of peace is it – how do you define it? Is it only when all the agenda items are done, the kids asleep, the rush of the day finally stops? The kind of Peace Jesus is talking about is much deeper than that. The partnership of God in your life – through the stories of who God is and what God has done, the person of Jesus and what he teaches/models/and accomplished for us and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit alongside of us everyday offering guidance to wisdom and reminders of how God has done this in the past are all part of a comforting and empowering partnership that tells us we are never alone and always loved by God. This is what calms us from the inside of who we are and not defined by the outside circumstances. Have you felt this? Do you cultivate this in your life?
- IV. In Acts, Paul has a vision to extend his work in another geographic area. What kind of “visions” have you had and followed in your life? A vision about a career, place to live, how many children you might have, what kind of person you might be.....etc.? How have you learned to become aware of these visions when they take place? How have you cultivated their presence in your life? Have you shared these experiences with others? Do you see these types of visions for your life getting worked out through the normal and even mundane routine and details of your days? What is necessary for you to start seeing things like this in your life?