

Sunday, May 29, 2022 Easter 7 *“Transformed and Living Anew”*

Psalm 97, Acts 16:16-34 John 17:20-26

What are the things we a people have been facing this past week? There are many things to consider that are new, but often what is before us falls into the categories of sins, sickness or conflicts or even celebrations! When we reflect on the impact of new covid19 cases here in Ontario we might think that there are not that many. But if we look at statistics of the state of Michigan, there are more cases than in all of Canada, we might wonder why there have been different protocols put in place. We have also heard about the spread monkeypox as it is now being transmitted throughout the world not as frequently as covid19 but still raising concerns.

Of course there are the concerns which come out o f the Ukraine/Russia conflict which we are now learning that innocent people have died as they were in the crossfire. There is also talk of Russian leaders being charged with war crimes as young children and innocent people have been killed in order to take over cities and resources. And this conflict still continues with many people having left the country leaving the men to fight back.

But there have also be other incidents in the news these last weeks- the killing of Black people in Buffalo for being black; and the children and teachers killed because a young man had mental health problems and had killed his grandmother and aimed to kill children. There has also been damage from storms leaving thousands without power and water. Many people have lost a great deal in property along with some people dying too.

The grief and sadness of these situations seems to build as one incident piles on top of another. Or is it because we are aware of situations faster and in some ways relate to the people and have empathy for others because we are human? The question I have for you is in all of these situations have you heard of any stories where people have attempted to be faithful, to confront the sins occurred and to proclaim a message of hope? Have you heard stories of people just being present with those who are grieving? These stories might include: working with those to help Ukrainian people to settle in Canada, workers sent to help restore power, and the call for tighter gun laws in the US? Because it is these stories that are seldom

shared- because they are difficult to sensationalize for they human emotions put into action. By faith we pray that these people are helping to lessen the loss, the grief and sorrow in order to restore hope. As long as we proclaim the hope of the gospel in this world, we will get discouraged yes, but we must rise above this and have believe that there is hope for this world and its people.

Our reading from Acts 16 is a story of Paul and Silas on the street as they were making their way to the place of prayer. A slave girl had a spirit of divination within her. Her owners made a lot of money because this girl had this 'gift' of fortune telling. But as Paul and Silas walked down the street she cried out, 'These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.' This did not occur only once, but for many days. Had she heard Paul's message of new life in Christ and wanted to change her life? Maybe she realized that her life as it was would never change until and unless she did something about it. She was a slave-girl, owned by men who saw her fortune telling as a means to get rich. They would not have to pay the girl, as they 'owned' her but how would she be able to break free from them?

This young girl had seen Paul and Silas more than once and she had called attention to them by naming them as 'slaves of God', Paul became annoyed. He turned to the girl, and said the spirit in her, I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it left her. The girl is set free by Paul but what is seen here is amazing. Paul was set free by God through Jesus Christ and here Paul is now freeing this young girl. Both are dependent upon God for their freedom to live. But, what is amazing is that both are transformed because of Christ Jesus.

The girl's owner are not happy that she has lost her 'gift of divination' and seize Paul and Silas. They drag them to the marketplace before the authorities. They make their statement, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews; and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." The crowds supported the girl's owners and so the magistrates had Paul and Silas stripped and beaten. They were thrown into prison and were kept under tight security with their feet in stocks.

Later that night, Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns to God. The other prisoners listened to them. An earthquake occurred which opened the doors of the prison cells and all

the prisoners' chains were unfastened. When the jailer awoke, he was about to kill himself as he had fallen asleep on the job and thought that everyone had left. But, Paul spoke to him and told him they were still there. The jailer called for lights, rushed in and then fell down before Paul and Silas and asked, "What must I do to be saved?"

When we reflect on this story we must realize the hope—when the young girl is set free of the fortune telling spirit, there is no further mention of her. But what occurs is a series of events which lead to the jailer in charge of the prisoners read to come to Christ and be saved. But he is not alone in this—Through the chains of prison, Paul and Silas sang to God and prayed and by doing this the other prisoners heard and believed. They were not only set free from the foot chains, they were free in spirit.

As we reflect on this season of Easter with its joys and celebration, with the world's events seeming to come closer to us than before, we have to be ready to answer the question the jailer asked if we truly believe that God is in control. If we truly have faith that each person may be transformed and changed to live a new life in Christ Jesus, we need to know how to share this with others. The Jailer asks, What must I do to be saved? Paul's answer is simple. "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household." Paul and Silas spoke with the jailer and all who were with him. The jailer then took care of their physical needs- cleaning them up. Paul and Silas then baptized the family and all ate together in celebration of becoming a believer in God.

As we bring our Easter series to a close we must reflect on what Jesus said and did as he prepared for his arrest trial and eventual death. He prayed for the disciples God had entrusted to him for 3 years; he prayed for those who would believe their words in the time to come and most earnestly he prayed that all may be one. We are a part of the Oneness that Christ desires. Jesus prayed for all who would believe in what teachers and preachers would speak to the generations which followed in the footsteps of his disciples. But we must ask, are we willing to be transformed and living the way of Christ even in these days filled with hurt, heartache, grief loss and pain? This is what being a faithful follower of Jesus is about—living a new life through Him. Being transformed not just a little bit- but truly living love with hope and empathy, care

and concern for other. It means realizing that Christian life is one of seeing things as God sees them. As we strive to see the bigger picture where love will win, we will be God's witnesses and know that it is God's transforming power which will bring all people into One. It is by God's grace that we will know God, experience anew Christ's teachings in our daily living, and know that the Spirit upon we wait, will guide us and lead us.

This is important, as we need to be able to face next week, next month and most especially today and tomorrow. What does living a transformed life mean? Paul writes in Romans 12, that to be transformed means renewing our mind and focusing on God's will for your life. It is by God's grace and your faith in God that you will live and love. Believe in Jesus the one who died and rose again; for it is through Him, that we are One in Christ and one with each other. This is the promise of Easter. Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Let us rejoice and sing of Christ Jesus for he is the One who reigns in our hearts and through whom all people are changed. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER

Holy God we praise you and thank you for Jesus Your Son who died and rose again for our sakes. Show us how to love as he did, teach us to be like him and call us to rejoice and praise his name as we seek to grow in faith and in hope. Amen.