

COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 15 MAY 2022- 7th of Easter

COLLECT

Risen, ascended Lord, as we rejoice at your triumph,
fill your Church on earth with power and compassion,
that all who are estranged by sin
may find forgiveness and know your peace,
to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Psalm 97

- 1 The Lord is king: let the earth rejoice; ♦
let the multitude of the isles be glad.
- 2 Clouds and darkness are round about him; ♦
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.
- 3 Fire goes before him ♦
and burns up his enemies on every side.
- 4 His lightnings lit up the world; ♦
the earth saw it and trembled.
- 5 The mountains melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, ♦
at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.
- 6 The heavens declared his righteousness, ♦
and all the peoples have seen his glory.
- 7 Confounded be all who worship carved images
and delight in mere idols. ♦
Bow down before him, all you gods.
- 8 Zion heard and was glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoiced, ♦
because of your judgements, O Lord.
- 9 For you, Lord, are most high over all the earth; ♦
you are exalted far above all gods.
- 10 The Lord loves those who hate evil; ♦
he preserves the lives of his faithful
and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.
- 11 Light has sprung up for the righteous ♦
and joy for the true of heart.
- 12 Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, ♦
and give thanks to his holy name.

Acts 16: 16-34

Paul and Silas in Prison

¹⁶ One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, 'These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you^a a way of salvation.' ¹⁸ She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And it came out that very hour.

¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place before the authorities. ²⁰ When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, 'These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews ²¹ and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.' ²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. ²³ After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴ Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted in a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.' ²⁹ The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them outside and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' ³¹ They answered, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' ³² They spoke the word of the Lord^a to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. ³⁴ He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

John 17: 20-26

²⁰ 'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,^a so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

²⁵ 'Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.'

A reflection from Hannah...

I once heard a preacher say unity is the easiest thing to preach, and the hardest thing to live. That's certainly born out in the world in general. As a fan of Eurovision (didn't think I'd go there, did you?!) I can relate to you decades of catchy tunes about peace and harmony. As a citizen of the European continent... indeed of the world... I can immediately counter that with many an example of schism, estrangement, war, destruction. Often the problem is that when we pray 'unity', what we're actually hoping will happen, is that God will change the minds of everyone who disagrees with us, and bring them to sense!

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus prays: 'The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one'. We are children of God- our first move when we pray is to put ourselves in the place of Jesus. And it sounds far too much to accept that we, in Christ, have been given glory. What does that glory mean? It means that as we rest in the knowledge that we are in Christ, who is ever praying for the whole of creation, we should expect to loosen our grip on that which diminishes us, and to grow into the things of glory in God's terms- the signs of the Kingdom.

How does that look? Well, if we are to pray for unity and mean it, it means we are ready to surrender ego, opinion, selfishness, power. If we are to participate in God's glory, it means proclaiming jubilee and living it- just as Jesus does- so it *will* mean miracles of reconciliation, forgiveness, generosity, liberation, justice, mercy and an end to poverty and prejudice and being overlooked. It will mean, in short, that we discover our true humanity- which Christ lives by example, and invites us to participate in.

And in so doing, we can expect to be uncomfortable. We are unlikely to discover a wholehearted endorsement for our own fairly developed views on how things should go! If we are serious about letting God align our frail, partial and misguided perspective with the ways of the Kingdom, then we should expect challenge, disruption even, on a large scale. That's not an easy thing, but it is

part of the deal of a Christ who dwells in us, we in him, and who brings our humanity into the stuff of heaven.

So as we wait these ten days... prayerfully... may you, may we, have the courage to embrace our true humanity as those who share in Christ's glory, so that we may be one.... wherever that leads us.

Thy Kingdom Come.

Amen.