

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

May 22, 2022 by Rev. Mark Brechin

## Commentary on Revelation 22:12-14, 16-21

Revelation ends much as it began with Jesus saying that "I am the Alpha and Omega" (1:8). The "tree of life" is referenced twice alluding to the restoration of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9, 3:24) as well as the purity of those who washed their robes (Proverbs 3:18, 13:12, 15:4). After referring to the testimony for the churches (2:1-3:22), Jesus mentions that he is the root of David (5:5, Isaiah 11:10) and the morning star (2:8, 2 Peter 1:19). The Spirit then says "Come" in verses 17 and 20. The Greek imperative used appears in Revelation Chapter 6 (1, 3, 5, 7), when Jesus tells Nathanael to "Come" (John 1:46), when they lead Jesus to Lazarus (John 11:34), and in Matthew and Luke when the Centurion speaks about the total obedience of his soldiers (Matthew 8:9, Luke 7:8). In all the uses of "Come", the implication is less of an invitation and more of a command both by Spirit and by the people. Now is the time for the people to come to Jesus for now is the time when Jesus may come back! This is why the writer includes the curse on anyone who tries to dilute this message (18-19) because it is not a simple prediction of the future but it is a call to repentance now.

Revelation 22:12 "See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work.

- If we are saved by faith, then what is "everyone's work"?
- Does this have something to do with "cheap grace"?
- Can we better understand this through the lens of marriage?
- Is it enough to say "I love you"?
- When have words fallen short and when have actions needed words as well?
- As your relationships have grown and deepened, has your relationship with God grown?

## Commentary on John 17:20-26

On the day this commentary was written (May 16, 2022), Cary McMullen, a Ledger Columnist, wrote the article *For Feuding Methodists, A Split Is Imminent*. The article ends with Cary writing, "Which only goes to show that partisanship – the drive to associate with those who agree with you – is powerful, and can overwhelm biblical admonitions about reconciliation and longstanding traditions about the error of schism. Even a leader as popular and talented as [Bishop Ken] Carter can't hold back that tide." It is difficult to find a better example of why Jesus made this prayer and how human brokenness within the church fails to proclaim the power of Jesus over the world. Whatever the justification, conflict within the church undermines Jesus' ministry of reconciliation, forgiveness, and healing. For those outside the church, our failures are testaments to the apparent insufficiency of God's grace. While proving ourselves right, we negate our witness. This is why Jesus prayed for the disciples both in the upper room and for all those yet to come.

John 17:21 "that they may all be one."

- Has the church ever been one?
- If the early apostles argued, is there any hope for us?
- How do you keep your family and friends together even during disagreements?
- Can grace and humility overcome hurt and pride?
- When have you experienced hurt and pride break a relationship?
- How did that relationship heal?

## Commentary on Acts 16:16-19, 23-34

Being led by the Spirit to bypass Turkey and go westward into northern Greece called Macedonia, Paul and Timothy enter Philippi. Philippi was on the major over land trade route between Byzantium (Constantinople) and Athens. With the conversion of Lydia earlier in the chapter, the door to Christian missions to Europe was open. After the conversion of Lydia, the next conversion was the local jailer and his family. The focus of the story is not necessarily on the slave-girl with the “spirit of divination” but on the compassion showed by Paul to the jailer after God opened all of the doors. It is important to note that while it appears that God made a way for Paul to escape, the larger plan was to bring another family to Jesus. The story of the casting out of the demon/spirit simply sets the stage for this conversion. Following this story, Paul allows his legalistic side to show when he reveals he is a Roman citizen and therefore beaten and imprisoned illegally. The use of his citizenship will eventually lead Paul to the prison in Rome. On a side note, it is interesting to compare John Wesley's experience with the Moravian missionaries singing on the boat to this story where Wesley acts more like the jailer than Paul.

Acts 16:28 But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."

Would you have stayed in jail or escaped?

If God makes a way, should we not take it?

Do we sometimes assume we know the way without asking God?

How did Paul's discernment of God's act show compassion?

When have you experienced a time when thinking of others before yourself opened unexpected doors?

### **Reflection on Revelation 22:12-14, 16-21, John 17:20-26, Acts 16:16-19, 23-34**

Sermon “Not all Black and White”

Childhood was an easier time when everything seemed black and white. Parents and teachers determined what was good and what was bad. Sometimes their rules were not always followed but nothing was ambiguous. Being an adult, however, means dealing with gray areas where the rules seem to always be changing. Simple decisions have unexpected consequences and common sense no longer makes sense in a different context and culture. It is not surprising that people listen to those who pretend to know the answer even when those answers are blatant lies.

As Christians, we are given the Holy Spirit who gives the gift of discernment. Discernment pierces thru the gray to reveal God's will in that situation. Even if the situation is similar to one in the past, God's will may be different depending upon God's plan. A simple decision like escaping from prison when God opens the door may not be so simple. When Peter was in prison (Acts 5) and God opened the door, God want Peter to leave but when something similar happens to Paul in today's reading, God wants Paul to stay. Discernment is not about knowing what is right and wrong but rather what God wants in that situation. The light of Jesus dispels the gray and reveals the way even if it is only for that day or that moment. This is why everyday we must pray “Come, Lord Jesus!”. Jesus reveals the path to follow and we are asked if we will respond, “Not my will but Thine”.

During this time of division within our church and society, it would seem that the need for discernment is especially necessary. Despite Jesus' prayer for unity in today's reading, the church has a long history of split. Preparing for this sermon on Monday, an article in The Ledger was written about the current split in the United Methodist Church that ended by saying, “Which only goes to show that partisanship – the drive to associate with those who agree with you – is powerful, and can overwhelm biblical admonitions about reconciliation and longstanding traditions about the error of schism.” Jesus' prayer seems fairly black and white. The church must not split or else it seems that the way of the world (partisanship) is greater than grace. But is the choice that simple?

Paul writes that the Body of Christ is made up of different members with different functions. While he was speaking about individual gifts, the concept could be applied to different expressions of

Christianity. Given the variety of cultures and perspectives about the world, different expressions of good news can make sense in different contexts. Sometimes a unified approach tends to exclude different views in favor of the median. By embracing differences, however, expressions of discipleship can provide authentic paths for a variety on contexts. The challenge is to not let that variety distort the universal love of God in Jesus Christ. By listening and understanding other expressions we can maintain a unity of the Spirit while maintaining a the validity of the path we have chosen. Just because one group is a hand, another a lung, and another of knee does not mean that the Body is not united. It is only when one expression claims to be the only true way that partisanship distorts and cripples the Body of Christ.

May we discern where Christ is calling each of us to walk even if that path may differ from those we respect or have followed in the path. If the path revealed is the will of God, than all the paths will contribute to God's plan for our salvation. Even in diversity, God's grace can create unity and love. That unity and love will one day be fully realized when Jesus returns. Until that time, let us pray for discernment as we cry, "Come, Lord Jesus!"