

John 17.20-26; Acts 16.16-34.

8th May 2016 - 7th Sunday of Easter

8:00 a.m. & 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's, Totteridge

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart always be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer (Ps.19:14).

We can all get caught up in the so-called 'real world' can't we. The struggle to make ends meet, to feed and care for partners and children, in coping with health issues or even the end of life. What's Christianity got to do with stuff like this? Well, God got involved with 'all of this' while he was here amongst us as Jesus Christ. He came as a little baby – so the mystery would not be unknowable – he can be a friend and a mystery.

Children are a gift from God – and even though God's so much bigger than all of us - we know in our hearts that all the little children are his – and even the grown-up ones too. Jesus gave up his life for us all that we might live – not just go on existing, but truly, joyfully, live. So even when we sin, make stupid, selfish mistakes that bring only darkness and gloom, we know that all we have to do is turn to him, repent, and we are embraced, celebrated, forgiven.

Strange things happen when we die to sin and embrace the light of life – we can be transformed, to become one who cares as much for others as we do for ourselves – but this is easier to say than to do because we like to conceal the God who wants to at home within us.

There's an old story I want to share with you about this, about God and the humans after 'The Fall' – that symbolic story of humankind's fall from a state of grace. Because humans had separated from God thru' disobedience, God decided to hide from humans, so he asked the angels where he should hide....

'Hide in the heights of heaven,' said the first angel. God replied, 'The humans would expect me to be in the high places and they will find me in their own high experiences.' The second angel said, 'Then why not hide in the depths?' God replied, 'Again, all human beings descend into the depths from time to time and they will discover that I am there.' One little angel had bided his time and he saw the mistakes of others. He said to God, 'Why not hide in the human heart? They will never find you there.' God smiled and said, 'How true', and from that day he hid in each human heart.

Yet there are so few humans who seek his presence in their lives. The great gift of God to us is that we dwell in him and he in us. We are never without the presence of God, for in him we live and move and have our dwelling, but we are more God-possessed than possessing God! This is the Glory and the love that we share: we can meet God in others and be God to others. The unity that we have is God-given. The joy we have is from our in-dwelling – something we need to take time to know and to enjoy.

Jesus prays for our unity with God – that we would form with him a relationship that never ends and always grows. This is a unity of love, that begins when we love each other as God loves us. Unity comes not through schemes and meetings but through heart-to-heart relationships. Paul and Silas are followers of Christ with whom they've formed a heart-to-heart relationship. They've taken time to get to know the God within their hearts, and they've been transformed... into people who care about other people as much as they care for themselves – even the one who was holding them prisoner.

When the earthquake opened all the prison doors, no matter how much they might have liked to escape, they couldn't just run away to leave the jailer to take his own life. They had to offer him the same salvation that they'd experienced. When the jailer sees their mercy and care, he is overwhelmed into action, to care for them in return, and then to have his own and his whole household's sins washed away in the waters of baptism.

Now I don't for a moment think that either Ben or Ella have been imprisoning holy people or anything quite like that, but I am pretty sure that, as adorable as we are privileged to know them to be, they are not quite perfect just yet. They, just like you and me, are capable of falling into the depths we talked about earlier, and it's because of this, and because we all need to be saved from falling, that we do what we do today – which is to bring them both before God, give thanks for their lives, deliver them from evil, until they are both old enough to decide to do this for themselves and be confirmed.

We will take joy today from their symbolic joining with the church family and they will receive that invisible badge of office as they are each signed with the cross, by me, their parents and their Godparents. We will then call down the Holy Spirit of God to sanctify the waters of baptism and in these waters they will symbolically die to sin and rise with Christ to a new life in the Spirit.

And we will pray that, just as the invisibility of that Spirit works power to transform lives, so one day, having grown in their relationship with God, they too may wield the invisible power of love to transform the lives of others, through the kindness, the generosity and the devotion that they demonstrate and spread in the 'real' world.

Amen.

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, 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.'

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 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 Jews²¹ 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. ²⁶Suddenly 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. ²⁷When 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. ²⁸But Paul shouted in a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.' ²⁹The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰Then he brought them outside and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' ³¹They answered, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' ³²They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. ³⁴He 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.

Revelation 22:12-14,16-17,20-21

12 'See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. ¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.'

14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.

16 'It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.' ¹⁷ The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.' And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

20 The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.'

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

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