

EASTER 6

Year C

This Bible study was written by Charlotte Wilson for Easter 6 (C) in 2016.

Acts 16:9-15

⁹ During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ When 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.

¹¹ We therefore set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and 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. ¹³ On 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. ¹⁴ A 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. ¹⁵ When 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.

Commentary from Charlotte Wilson

Hospitality in the first century Roman Empire was risky. It was not simply inviting someone over for dinner or even offering them a place to stay for the night. Instead, it carried with it an offering of protection and provisions for the journey ahead. It signaled a commitment to enter into permanent relationship with another. A family would offer hospitality to people like them, social equals who could be trusted to reciprocate when needed.

So it is significant that throughout Acts, the apostles receive hospitality from people who are not like them, including Gentiles and businesswomen like Lydia. The power of the Holy Spirit explodes the dividing walls between strangers and knits them into a community of friends and co-workers for the spread of the Gospel. After Lydia and her household are baptized, she urges the apostles to stay with her and provides for Paul and Silas after they are released from prison (Acts 16:40).

Discussion Questions

Where have you seen the Holy Spirit create surprising community?

What are the dividing walls separating people from each other in your neighborhood?

Lydia and the apostles were open to God’s Word and their lives were radically changed. What practices help you stay open to the Word?

Psalm 67

- ¹ May God be merciful to us and bless us, *
show us the light of his countenance and
come to us.
- ² Let your ways be known upon earth, *
your saving health among all nations.
- ³ Let the peoples praise you, O God; *
let all the peoples praise you.
- ⁴ Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, *
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide all the nations upon earth.
- ⁵ Let the peoples praise you, O God; *
let all the peoples praise you.
- ⁶ The earth has brought forth her increase; *
may God, our own God, give us his blessing.
- ⁷ May God give us his blessing, *
and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe
of him.

Commentary from Charlotte Wilson

Psalm 67 is a communal song of petition and praise, calling on God to bless Israel so that the whole world will know the Holy One's justice, power, and guidance. We see this in the symmetrical structure of the psalm. Verses 1 and 7 begin with a petition for God's blessing, while verses 2 and 6 concern the earth. Verses 3 and 5 are identical, and our attention is drawn to verse 4, the only three line verse in the psalm: "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide all the nations upon earth." God's blessing is not just for Israel, but for the whole earth. The petitions voiced in this song are universal rather than contextualized.

Discussion Questions

Given the world as you know it today, what might these blessings look like?

Where is God's saving health needed?

Where is God's justice and guidance needed?

Using Psalm 67 as a model, write your own song of petition and praise, being as specific as possible.

Revelation 21:10, 22:1-22:5

¹⁰ And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴ they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Commentary from Charlotte Wilson

The book of the Revelation to John is addressed to “the seven churches that are in Asia” (Revelations 1:4) and was written in the second half of the first century C.E. The beginning chapters of the book describe the various challenges those churches are facing, from imprisonment and death to spiritual complacency. John exhorts these Christians to “be faithful until death” (2:10b) and to be persistent in seeking a transformed life (3:18-20). Life in the Roman Empire held out visions of many different objects of worship, including multiple gods and the emperor. In Revelation, John records larger visions, reminding the churches of God’s sovereignty.

This particular passage offers the promise of the new Jerusalem, where God’s glory is the only light needed and the nations will dwell together in safety and wholeness. When the lectionary leaves out many verses, I like to find out what is missing. In this case, the compilers omitted several verses describing the new Jerusalem’s opulent walls and gates. Take the time to read these verses. Imagine the vision John is describing— a glorious city more radiant than anything the Roman Empire could construct.

Discussion Questions

How does this city, the river, and the tree of life appear in your imagination?

Which aspect of John’s description offers you the most powerful sense of hope for your life, your community, or the world?

How might you live into that hope with faithful courage?

John 14:23-29

²³ Jesus answered him, “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. ²⁴ Whoever 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. ²⁶ But 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. ²⁷ Peace 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. ²⁸ You 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. ²⁹ And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur you may believe.

Commentary from Charlotte Wilson

Jesus’s words to Judas (not Iscariot) are part of a larger conversation at the Last Supper. Jesus is preparing his disciples to live faithfully after he has gone from them physically. They are understandably disturbed by this talk, but Jesus repeats his words of peace and assurance. Jesus has brought them into an abiding love relationship with God that has implications for their lives whether they are in Jesus’s physical presence or not.

The Advocate, the paraclete, is the Holy Spirit, sent to abide with the disciples (14:17) and to remind them of Jesus’s words and teaching. He is not leaving the disciples orphaned (14:18), and yet we can imagine how upsetting this conversation would be.

Discussion Questions

Jesus’s promise of the Holy Spirit and his gift of peace are intertwined. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit’s abiding presence in your life?

Where do you sense a need for Christ’s peace today? Take a few moments to pray for peace now.