

EASTER 7

Year C

Tina Francis is a seminarian at the Seminary of the Southwest.

Love In a Waiting Room

They stood in the hollow of time. In the ache between what had been and what had not yet begun. Jesus was gone. The Spirit—that wild, uncatchable thing—had not yet whispered their names. They were between stories, between breaths. The resurrection had happened. But the world had not yet caught up.

This week's readings don't offer closure. They invite us into the raw, unresolved tension of faith. The kind that bruises but sings. The kind that waits—with breath caught between pain and promise.

What is waiting, if not hunger? A longing stretched out too long. A hope whispered into silence. They had seen a miracle, the impossible. And still—Rome was Rome. The whip still cracked. The coins still clinked in the hands of those with palaces, but no neighbors.

And yet, something was moving. Not in the palace. Not in the courts. But in the bruised mouths of prisoners who sang at midnight. In the tremble of the ground beneath men who thought themselves immovable. This kingdom wasn't coming the way kingdoms usually do. No trumpets. No thrones. Just an empty tomb. A waiting room. A prayer mumbled into the dark.

And still—love. A love that sits in the tension of an unfinished story.

This week's readings ask us a hard and holy question: What if resurrection isn't the end of pain, but the beginning of practice?

Acts 16:16-34

¹⁶ One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave 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 the 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 marketplace before the authorities. ²⁰ When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city" ²¹ and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being 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 in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² They spoke the word of the Lord 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.

Commentary from Tina Francis

"Well, That Escalated... Backwards"

She was a slave girl who knew things—things that made powerful men nervous. Her life was measured in coins passed from hand to hand. She was doubly bound—owned in body and haunted in spirit—and had nothing left to lose. So, she followed Paul and Silas through the streets, shouting what was true—but truth spoken by the wrong person is still ignored. Eventually, Paul—frustrated, not merciful—turned and cast the spirit out. It fled. And she was free.

But her freedom meant someone lost their income. A substantial loss for the men who—we should say it plain—owned her. So, they retaliated the way power always does when threatened. Paul and Silas were seized, dragged before the authorities, stripped and beaten. Shackled like dangerous men. Because profit lost is a dangerous thing—a crime.

In the darkness of the prison, with broken bodies and aching wrists—they sing. A hymn through swollen lips. A melody wrapped around bruised ribs. And the earth listens. The prison shakes. The doors fling open. The chains fall.

And curiously—they do not run.

The jailer, who held the keys, sees the destruction and panics. Fearing disgrace, he prepares to take his own life. But Paul calls out—loud and tender—interrupting despair: "Do not harm yourself. We are all here."

Record scratch. The whole story turns inside out. The captives stay. The jailer is the one set free. The ones in chains do the freeing. The kingdom of God arrives—not with fanfare, but soft-footed, in the dead of night. And a prison becomes—somehow—a place of joy.

Discussion Questions

Who are you in this story? The girl who shouts the truth? The prisoner who sings anyway? The jailer undone by grace?

What chains—seen or unseen—are still binding you?

And what if freedom doesn't look like escape, but like staying put... until something sacred breaks open?

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 foundations
of his throne.
- ³ A fire goes before him *
and burns up his enemies on every side.
- ⁴ His lightnings light up the world; *
the earth sees it and is afraid.
- ⁵ The mountains melt like wax at the presence of
the Lord, *
at the presence of the Lord of the whole
earth.
- ⁶ The heavens declare his righteousness, *
and all the peoples see his glory.
- ⁷ Confounded be all who worship carved images and
delight in false gods! *
Bow down before him, all you gods.
- ⁸ Zion hears and is glad, and the cities of Judah
rejoice, *
because of your judgments, O Lord.
- ⁹ For you are the Lord, 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 saints and delivers
them from the hand of the wicked.
- ¹¹ Light has sprung up for the righteous, *
and joyful gladness for those who are
truehearted.
- ¹² Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, *
and give thanks to his holy Name.

Commentary from Tina Francis

"This Is Why We Can't Have a Nice... God?"

If you're looking for a nice, polite God, who shows up on time and doesn't make a mess—you're not going to find him here. Psalm 97 is not the God of inspirational mugs and pithy bumper stickers.

The psalmist tells us God arrives in thick darkness, in rolling clouds, in lightning that sets fire to the sky. This is a God who comes like ravenous fire. Not your standard, cozy fire, but the kind that devours. The kind that clears the land of everything pretending to be unshakable.

God's arrival makes mountains fold in on themselves. Even the tallest, surest things—the ones we thought would stand forever—melt like wax. And wax, if you've seen it melt, does not resist. It simply yields.

And yet.

There is another kind of fire. A fire that does not destroy but remembers. A fire that does not consume but calls your name.

Light has sprung up for the righteous. Joy for the truehearted.

This is fire that shows the way home. Fire that burns away all that is false, until only what is true remains.

So, we're left with a question. When the fire comes—because it will—will we brace ourselves against it? Or will we yield, and let it remake us?

Discussion Questions

What in you needs to be turned to ash, and what needs to be remade?

How have you experienced both the terror and the tenderness of 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.”

¹⁴Blessed 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.”

¹⁷The 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.

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

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

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

Commentary from Tina Francis

“For the Weirdos and the Weary”

What if the end is not the slamming of a door, but the sound of one creaking open? What if this strange, final word—the one that comes after the dragons and the despair, after the blood and the beast—isn’t a threat, but a welcome? With someone whispering your name into the dark—“come.”

“Let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life... as a gift.”

Not a prize for the pious or a secret for the clever. A gift—unearned, unmeasured—just given. Because grace is ridiculous like that. This isn’t Rome’s way. Rome says, “Prove it. Earn it. Deserve it.” But this city—this kingdom whose gates never close—says you’re already enough. This isn’t a kingdom for the shiny and successful. It’s for the weirdos, the weary, the ones who cry at commercials.

Jesus says, “I am coming soon.” This isn’t a quiet waiting. We wait the way women in labor wait—breath caught between pain and promise. We wait by giving ourselves over to what will outlast the ache. We wait by becoming the welcome.

Come, Lord Jesus.

We are not waiting for the end. We are living at the beginning of something that hasn’t fully arrived but is already true. We will speak as those who’ve seen what mercy can do. We will believe—still, even now—that joy will have the final word.

Discussion Questions

What part of you is still thirsty, still exiled, still waiting at the edge of the city?

Where have you mistaken the gates for walls?

What if the new city is already rising beneath your feet?

John 17:20-26

²⁰ “I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who 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.”

Commentary from Tina Francis

“Oneness. Not Sameness.”

Right before everything went wrong—or maybe right, depending on how you read the story—before the cross, before the wounds, before the long silence of Saturday, Jesus prays. And it’s not a prayer for one final miracle to shake the mountains and knock Caesar off his horse, which if we’re honest would have been very satisfying. He prays that we would love each other. That we would be one.

Not unity like Rome. Rome liked its lines straight, and its sandals polished and its enemies quiet. Jesus asks for a different kind of oneness—that’s ragged and stitched together and a little leaky at the seams. The kind you see when your brother screws up and you still help him move his couch anyway. The kind that takes work. That smells like soup and tears.

This unity—this holy, fragile thing—is not about disappearing. It’s about becoming. Becoming bound in love so thick, so visible, so stubborn it refuses to leave.

“So that the world may believe.” Not because we’ve argued them into it, or because we’ve dazzled them with brilliance or force. But because there is something in this way of love that undoes the world’s logic. Something so tender it feels dangerous. Something so faithful it sets the soul free. Love that sings even with broken ribs. Love that keeps binding wounds long after the headlines have moved on.

This is the final prayer: that love would outlive the wound. That oneness would triumph over fear. That we would not forget how to belong to each other.

This is the prayer. This is the legacy. This is the invitation.

Discussion Questions

In what ways do we still prefer the unity of Rome—controlled, clean, efficient—over the slow, vulnerable unity of love?

What would it mean to treat the church not as an institution to defend, but as a communion to be risked?