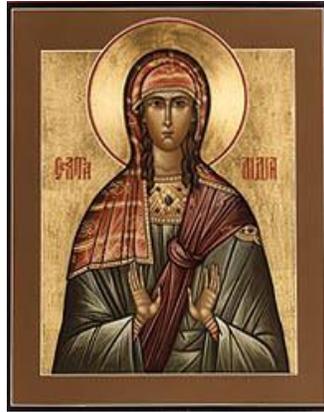


## *Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary*

Readings, Commentary, and Questions for Discussion for May 26, 2019

Sixth Sunday of Easter



### THE READINGS

#### **First Reading: Acts 16:9-15**

<sup>9</sup> 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.”

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, <sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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.



*Worth Noting: Here’s a recent picture of the traditional site of the baptism of Lydia. Paul, rather than going to the local synagogue on the Sabbath, went to the countryside and found women who worship God; that is, were affiliated with the religion of the Jews. Why Paul broke his habit and went there is mysterious, but we do know meetings in the countryside, outside of major cities and often near flowing water, were common for early Christian communities.*

*Acts may be reflecting this practice or establishing its origins in this story. Does your community*

*enjoy outdoor worship services? What is gained and what is lost by moving out of the usual worship space (acoustics, distractions, proximity to nature, and so forth)?*

### **Psalm 67**

<sup>1</sup> May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us,  
<sup>2</sup> that your way may be known upon earth,  
your saving power among all nations.  
<sup>3</sup> Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.

<sup>4</sup> Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations upon earth.

<sup>5</sup> Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.

<sup>6</sup> The earth has yielded its increase;  
God, our God, has blessed us.

<sup>7</sup> May God continue to bless us;  
let all the ends of the earth revere him.

*Worth Noting: The psalmist has plagiarized from Numbers 6:24-26 (the priestly blessing) in the opening verses. While we know giving a blessing can be a powerful experience that anyone and everyone can do, at first we may find it an embarrassing practice. Would you give a loved one a blessing this week? How about someone with whom you are in conflict?*

### **Second Reading: Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5**

<sup>10</sup> 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. . . <sup>22</sup> I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. <sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. <sup>25</sup> Its gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. <sup>27</sup> But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

<sup>22:1</sup> 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 <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; <sup>4</sup> they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> 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.

*Worth Noting: Like Psalm 67, Revelation heavily relies on imagery from other Scriptures. Here the description of the city takes up images from Ezekiel 47 while the tree of life harkens back to the creation account in Genesis 2. Revelation 22:5 echoes Isaiah 60:19 and Psalm 84:11. To fully appreciate Revelation requires knowledge and appreciation of the Old Testament. How would you go about cross referencing all of these quotations and allusions?*

**Gospel: John 14:23-29** *Alternative John 5:1-9*

<sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> “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. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.”

*Worth Noting: What kind of peace does Jesus offer? One priest used to say “Christ’s challenging and consoling peace be with you.” What constitutes peace for you and your community? Is it only the absence of conflict? Can there be peace (in some sense) in the midst of conflict?*

## CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES

### Entering into the Scriptures

Christians, particularly Christians in Europe and the Americas, may believe that Christianity is the religion of universal love, that it knows no bounds. The Gospel of John presents another strain of Christianity. Here, Jesus demands that his followers keep his word (John 14:23), by which the author means believing in Jesus’ unity with the Father. John’s Gospel is sometimes cited as the Gospel of love, but Jesus enjoins the principle that his followers love each other without reference to anyone else (last week’s Gospel, John 13:34). The Gospel, perhaps written at a time of pressure on the community, stresses the uniqueness, the particularity of the community with no little implication that those outside the community will not enjoy God’s love.

Don’t be surprised when we say that this is not the only stance taken in the Bible. For instance, unlike other creation accounts, the Bible’s opening passage does not valorize any particular place on earth – no region, no city, no nation, no family (Genesis 1:1-2:3). The God whom the Israelites worship has created the whole world and, in the beginning, had no favorites. Psalm 67, above, asserts that “all the nations” praise you, God, *Elohim*, the creator God of Genesis 1. The story of Jonah emphasizes the judgment of God over all nations and the ability of Gentile nations to respond to that God. Crucially, while the Old Testament emphasizes the chosenness of the Israelites, there is no claim that those outside the Covenant with the LORD are necessarily evil just because they *are* outside the Covenant. That contrasts with the stance in the Gospel of John that seems to demand membership in a

particular community to be “good.”

The text from Revelation seems closer to the Old Testament understanding than to John’s. The gates of the New Jerusalem stay open 24/7. Entry is freely given to those written in the book of life (Revelation 21:25-27), presumably but not necessarily referring to baptism. Note that the Lamb has waged war against Satan and his minions, not against the other nations.

Of course, Paul calls himself the apostle to the Gentiles, called to bring the nations to worship the God of Israel. This Sunday’s account of his first missionary trip to Europe highlights that a dream galvanizes him into action. A similar angelic vision led Cornelius, a Gentile centurion to send for Peter (Acts 10:1-8) and another vision prompted Peter to respond. While the angels give neither Cornelius nor Peter much of a hint what to do once they meet, the message for the Church is clear: God works among the Gentiles, among the pagans, just as the LORD God works among Christians and Jews. Indeed: “All the peoples praise you O God, let all the peoples praise you.”

### **Reading the Old Testament in the New Testament**

Like the writer of Psalm 67, the authors of the New Testament heavily relied on vocabulary and imagery from the Old Testament, which was, of course, their only Scripture. The book of Revelation is especially dependent on these texts, but Paul quotes extensively from and makes allusions to his Scriptures. All the New Testament writers, especially Matthew, picked verses from Scripture to demonstrate how Jesus’ life and ministry fulfilled prophecies.

More than that, however, the New Testament writers assumed a view of the world and an understanding of God’s work that comes from the Old Testament. They recognized that from creation God exercises dominion over all creatures; that God has chosen the descendants of Abraham to fulfill a particular mission; that God’s justice is also God’s mercy. The Scriptures they revered tell a story of the humans struggle to maintain our promises in our relationship with God.

### **Questions for Discussion**

How do you and your community relate to the Old Testament? Do you honor the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the God of Jesus of Nazareth and Paul of Tarsus? Ever hear a sermon based on an Old Testament text? (Sermon on Psalm 23 at a funeral does not count.)

How do you understand Baptism? Is it necessary for salvation?

Scripture emphasizes the expansiveness and inclusiveness of God’s love. But every community has boundaries, defining who is “in” and who “out.” Someone who does not show up, for instance, is “out.” For your community, is anyone who shows up an insider? And what constitutes “showing up”?

Again, for your community, who are the outsiders? Non-Christians? Christians who do not worship exactly as you do?



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*Icon of St Lydia and the photograph of the site of her baptism are via Wikimedia Commons.*

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