

## **Come, Lord Jesus**

The Seventh Sunday of Easter is always a peculiar day on which to preach. It comes a few days after the Ascension, so Jesus is no longer on earth. The Day of Pentecost is still a week away, and presumably the disciples have no idea what is coming next. In Lectionary Year A, at least, we hear about the Ascension in a reading from the Acts of the Apostles. Other years, like this one, we are left in spiritual limbo. We have neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit. What's a preacher to do?

Fortunately, we still have stories about the early church from the Acts of the Apostles. In today's passage Paul managed to get himself thrown into jail yet again, this time taking Silas with him. It's not clear why Paul was so annoyed when the slave girl kept crying out; after all, Paul *did* consider himself a slave of God and proclaimed a way of salvation. Perhaps he was miffed that she got as much attention as he did. In any case, he ordered the spirit of divination to leave her, after which she was useless to her owners. They then turned against Paul, and he ended up beaten and in prison. The story of how this led to the baptism of the jailer and his entire household is a wonderful example of how good can come out of suffering, a message that we need to hear again and again.

This morning we also heard the very last verses of the entire Bible, the end of the Book of Revelation. I find that helpful during a time of spiritual limbo. It's always good to have some idea of where a journey will end when one starts out. It provides motivation to keep going when the going gets rough. I admit that the Book of Revelation may not be the best guidepost, however. Several years ago I taught a course on Revelation, and afterwards one of the participants admitted that he understood as little after the class as he did beforehand. I didn't take it personally; Revelation is just like that.

The book ends with a deep sense of completion, of wholeness, of finally arriving in the presence of God. That's a great way to finish the Bible. We just heard Jesus describe himself in three ways that give a sense of wholeness. I am the Alpha and the Omega, he said. The first and the last. The beginning and the end. We also heard Bible images that connect Jesus with all of history. He is the root and descendant of David. He is the bright morning star, the Lord of all creation.

Revelation also has a deep sense of yearning. Again and again there is a plea for Jesus to come again, because when he comes, everything will be made right with the world. Good will be rewarded and evil will be punished at the final judgment. If too many Christians have focused on that judgment, thinking they can do God's work of deciding who is in and who is out, well, that's not the Bible's fault. That's the fault of human nature.

Our hearts are restless, St. Augustine said, until they rest in God. In this passage we heard the desire for that rest as "come" or "coming" expressed five times in two verses. The Spirit says come and everyone who hears says come. Those who are thirsty are invited to come and take the water of life as a free gift. Jesus says he is coming soon. And the author agrees. "Come, Lord Jesus."

That's the best message for this time between the departure of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit. We, too, have a deep yearning for the day when all will be made right, when wars will cease, when children will no longer die, when crying and pain and suffering will be no more. Until that time arrives, Jesus promised, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will walk alongside us. Even so, the day of Jesus cannot come soon enough. Come, Lord Jesus. Come and make all things new.

[Easter 7: Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12-14; 16-17; 20=21; John 17:20-26.]