

The Temple is Gone - Easter 6 – Year C

I said last week that I thought the Easter season readings were inviting us – and perhaps I should have said “*challenging*” us – to let God out of the tomb. And I think our readings for today take us down that same path – this time inviting us to let God out of the temple, out of the church, out of any place where we have relegated God to stay put.

The reading from Revelation is our first hint about the need to let God out of the temple. If you noticed, if you read the flowery passage again, you’ll see – there IS no temple. No – in the holy city Jerusalem that the visionary sees, GOD is the temple. That is, there is no house for God, because God IS the place where God dwells. – Harken back with me to last week’s reading from Revelation:

“I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
"See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them as their God;
they will be his peoples...”

So – the temple is gone. Of course, for the believers hearing the words of Revelation at the time it was written, the temple *was* gone – it had been destroyed. So this proclamation that God is present *outside* the temple, that God’s presence, in fact, IS the temple, and that “the home of God is among mortals” was certainly consolation to the people who wondered how they could worship, how they could *be* a community, God’s people *without* the temple.

Yes, if we let God out of the temple, we will find God dwelling with us...
But God dwelling with us will certainly take us, sometimes, where we had not planned on going.

And that takes us to our first reading from Acts. Paul essentially had other plans about where his next missionary journeys should take him. And then he has a vision that he should go help a man in the region of Macedonia. So off he goes, with his companions, and they end up in Philippi – a Roman colony. That’s fine for Paul, who has the privilege of Roman citizenship, but not so much for his companions, perhaps. Note that they go *outside* the city gates – by the river – where they thought they might find a place of prayer. And there they find a group of *women* praying, led by Lydia – a woman who deals in purple cloth. Certainly not the *man* Paul was expecting to encounter. Lydia was a worshiper of God – but not a Jew. For Paul, then, this encounter is outside boundaries in all sorts of ways. He gives them the good news of God in Christ, the Spirit opens Lydia’s heart to hear, and then she prevails upon Paul and the others to stay in her house. --- Paul was led by the spirit to let go of what *he* had planned, then to let go of his expectation that God would have him sharing the good news with a *man* – and to let go of prohibitions about staying in the household of a woman. God was bigger than Paul’s understanding or his expectations.

Ah, but that is what we heard in our opening collect: “O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding...” When we walk outside the safety of the city gates, when we listen closely to the Spirit, when we are willing to let go of our expectations and prohibitions, then God can and does indeed provide such good things as surpass our understanding.

In today’s Gospel passage, we are still hearing Jesus’s Farewell Discourse... and there we hear again the assurance that we heard from the visionary in last week’s reading from Revelation: “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.*” Yes, “the home of God is among mortals!”

And then we are promised the Advocate – the Spirit – who will teach us everything and remind us of all that Jesus said and did.

But we have to listen to that Spirit – even when we know full well that doing so will likely mean letting go of *our* plans, *our* expectations, and our prohibitions.

I've told you before about my older cousin, a holy Franciscan now gone to God. I can still hear her saying during a retreat – “But I'm not sure I WANT the Holy Spirit to come!”

Letting God out of the temple will most likely wreak havoc. Listening to the Spirit will change us. Loving this Jesus and keeping his word – his command to love one another as he has loved us – will change us. But that is exactly what we prayed:

“Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire.”

May it be so.

Amen.

- [Acts 16:9-15](#)
- [Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5](#)
- [John 14:23-29](#)
- [Psalm 67](#)