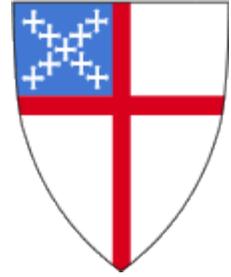


Sermon for Trinity Episcopal Church on the  
**Seventh Sunday of Easter**

June 2, 2019

By The Rev. Dr. Gail Shafer  
Year C RCL



- [Acts 16:16-34](#)
- [Revelation 22:12-14,16-17,20-21](#)
- [John 17:20-26](#)
- [Psalm 97](#)

What a beautiful day. We are out here, enjoying the beauty of the outdoors. We are however, in a between time. Between spring and summer, and between the ascension of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit. For the disciples, it was a really scary time. Christ had educated them, prepared them, encouraged and cajoled them. He modeled how he wanted them to live, and gave them the stories to tell to the world to bring the world to God. Then he left them with a promise.

It's like that time between planting the seeds and seeing the first seedlings. Is the seed good? Will it germinate? It is mixed with weeds? Or between graduation and the first job. Did I learn enough? Am I really ready to go it alone?

Yesterday I spent the entire day at the Cathedral of the Diocese of Michigan, helping elect the 11<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Michigan. After 20 years of leadership by Bishop Wendell Gibbs, Jr. There will be a new face in the Episcopate. A new person to learn about, to develop a relationship with, and to serve. After five ballots, The

Rev. Dr. Bonnie Perry was elected. Perhaps you all know that it takes a majority of both clergy and lay delegates to elect a new bishop. And it has to happen on the same ballot. And that's after about a year of searching, interviewing, meet and greets, screening, and examination.

Four candidates were on the slate, each with her own gifts. The others dropped off one by one. Finally, we elected an enthusiastic, joyful, knowledgeable, scholarly woman. And she was elected without concern for the potential controversies of so many of her episcopal predecessors. She is opening gay, and married. It may be too much to ask for the general public and the press to focus on her qualifications for this challenging position. One has to wonder if she will be invited to Lambeth. But those thoughts weren't even on the horizon as we voted, hour after hour, ballot after to ballot.

The seed has been planted, and now we must wait for the standing committees from all the dioceses to weigh in. Each diocese must give its consent for any new bishop to be confirmed. Just like the disciples waited between the ascension of Jesus, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the people of the diocese of Michigan must wait. We await the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

*To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith*

*by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.*

Throughout the day yesterday, Bishop Gibbs led us in prayers asking for these gifts, asking for us all to be in the presence of, and under the influence of, the Holy Spirit. And now, there is a new, modern day disciple chosen to serve.

When we read the stories about Paul and the other apostles who were so imbued with these gifts; there is so often angst. And in this story today, where Paul and Silas are being followed around by a girl who is possessed by a demon that continues to proclaim their mission. At first, I wonder if it was, you, know, okay. It might have sounded like an affirmation: "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation."

Even the demons recognized these saints as God's own. But after a while it was just too much of a not so good thing. And in a moment of impatience, Paul sends the demon packing. Setting he and his companion up for physical torture, and imprisonment. But it also sets the stage for an amazing demonstration of the power of God. The very earth shakes at his command, opening up the cells and freeing the

prisoners. What would you do at a moment like that? Personally? I would escape, man. Run like crazy.

But they took pity on their jailer, and remained where they were. Staying his hand from killing himself for failing at his job, and finally welcoming him, and all those he loved, into the community of Christ. Whoa.

They were repaid for their courage and generosity. They were given comfort by the very person that would have exacted punishment before this miracle. He recognized God in their actions, and he responded with good works.

We are given the promise of salvation through grace. It is not our actions, but our belief in Christ that gives the assurance of the gift of salvation. But in today's scripture, intermingled with the promise, is the warning that there is the expectation of seeking forgiveness through repentance. Changing behavior.

Turning away from evil, and toward the kind of behavior that shows that we are followers of Christ. Because we have been promised the grace of God, we turn away from sin, and turn toward good works.

It takes more than lip service, it takes the difficult but simple act of stopping our sinful behavior, and becoming loving people. Paul and Silas showed love toward their enemy, the jailer. They risked their lives. They risked the likelihood of more beatings. They stood their ground, and gave a gift of love to a man who, used to

totalitarian retribution, was certain of such punishment that taking his own life was preferable to waiting.

Jesus prays to the Father for his disciples, and for us because we have come to believe through the words of the apostles. He prays that we will see him in his glory. That we will be among those who join him with the father in heaven. Just as the Father knew him from the foundations of the world, it was always the design that we would love, and be loved by God. And we are just supposed to love God, and love each other.

We find ourselves, in so many ways, firmly planted on terra firma, looking up as Jesus ascends, his sandaled feet touching the clouds as he disappears from our sight. Like the disciples that actually witnessed the miracle that day, we are left here, wondering what's next? Are we enough? Are we up to the tasks that Jesus has given us to do?

Have you heard the old adage; "God doesn't give you more that you can handle"? Actually, God gives us more that we can handle – by ourselves – all the time. He doesn't give us more that we can handle with His help. With the gifts of the Holy Spirit, with the Love of Jesus, and with the power of God, there is nothing we cannot do. And so, we are enough. We are up to anything he gives us to do – with his help.