Acts 16:16-34 **Sermon** **7th Sunday of Easter**
Ps. 97 **By** **June 1, 2025**
Rev. 22:12-14,16-17,20-21 **The Rev. Stephen Askew**
John 17:20-26

"Come Lord Jesus be our guest, our morning joy, our evening rest, and with our daily bread impart, your love and peace to every heart." Come, Lord Jesus, come.

This past Thursday was a special feast day in the church year, a day which may have passed you by. It might have passed me by, but the church where I served as a curate right after seminary was named for this feast day and significant event in our Lord's life - the Church of the Ascension. Yes, three days after Jesus' crucifixion he was raised from the dead, which we know as Easter Sunday. Then forty days later he ascended into heaven, on what we now call Ascension Day. Ten days after that, on the Day of Pentecost, which we will celebrate next Sunday, our Lord sent the Holy Spirit to sustain, guide, and strengthen his disciples. "Do not leave us comfortless," is our prayer in today's collect, "but send us your Holy Spirit," we ask. And as we read in Revelation, Jesus testifies to his followers: "Surely I am coming soon." To which our response follows most naturally: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"

For those who knew Jesus personally on earth, this short ten day period between his ascension to the Father and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, must have seemed an eternity. It was a "liminal time" in which one stands on the threshold between the no longer and the not yet. No longer was Jesus bodily present on earth, even as the risen Christ, nor had the Lord sent the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, as he promised. This was indeed a time between the no longer and the not yet.

Liminal times are times of grieving, excited anticipation, and anxiety all rolled into one. We may grieve a time and place we cannot go back to, anxiously look forward to what

we hope and expect to come next, while we remain uncertain as to when and what that future might bring. You may have experienced such times between graduation and your next path in life, be it college, work, or some further training. A liminal time might be that between engagement and marriage, between a pregnancy and childbirth, between an illness or injury and healing, between the daily routine of work and the less structured life of retirement, between our last breath and the mystery of life after death. How do we manage to get through these liminal times? They are often not easy and may be quite frightening.

In liminal times we may feel as though we are no longer standing on firm ground, but rather that we are quickly sinking, as you might recall Peter did when trying to walk on water to meet his Lord on the Sea of Galilee. Having left one shore in a small boat but not yet having reached land on the other side, Peter and his fellow disciples faced rough waves and a strong wind. When Peter tried to join his Lord who called him to walk across the sea toward him, he began to sink more and more with each step. Frightened, Peter called out: "Lord, save me!" Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and held on to Peter until they were safely back in the boat. Perhaps it was by walking on water that Jesus showed his disciples that through faith in the Lord God, they would always find themselves on firm ground, even in times of the no longer and not yet.

Wasn't it just such faith that Paul and Silas demonstrated years later when shackled and locked in the inner most cell of a prison in Philippi? There they were no longer free Roman citizens to teach and spread the Good News, nor did they know their fate. But caught in this liminal time and place, they calmly prayed and sang hymns to God through the night. What words they used we do not know, but surely what their Lord heard was "Come, Lord Jesus, come!" And the Lord did come in the form of an earthquake, which opened the doors that imprisoned them and broke the chains that held them tight. As followers of Christ, in liminal times we can learn to pray as Paul and the first disciples

prayed - “Come, Lord Jesus,” come stand by our side, come and comfort us in our uncertainty, come and steady us as we go forward.

The jailor in today’s story from Acts found himself in a liminal place as well following the earthquake, a time between holding the prisoners securely and then possibly witnessing their escape, a time between his commander’s confidence in him as a guard and the consequences if the prisoners went free. He knew that he could very well face prison himself, or worse. In order to escape humiliation, his first impulse was to take his own life. But to his surprise, Paul offered the jailor another way forward - to believe on the Lord Jesus, along with his household, and receive eternal life. So taking a bold risk, the jailor escorted Paul and Silas to his house and washed their wounds; Paul and Silas then washed the jailor and his entire family in the waters of baptism with the faith that Christ would come into their lives through the Holy Spirit. As they all shared a meal together, they rejoiced that the jailor and his household had become believers in the Lord. In this moment of fellowship, they all found themselves no longer sinking, but on solid ground.

In today’s world, we do not have to look very far beyond ourselves, or dig very deep on social media, to find stories of those living in a liminal time or place. The innocent citizens of both the Ukraine and in Gaza are living in great uncertainty and hardship between a time of peace they once knew and the hope for its restoration. Many immigrants, who sacrificed all they had to make the long and perhaps perilous journey to this country, are living between a time of striving to build a new and more prosperous life and the threat of being arrested and deported to a place unknown. A number of our own citizens are living between a time when they enjoyed job security working for the government and its many programs, and now suddenly unemployed, are wondering what they will do to provide for themselves and their families. Many of our senior citizens, myself included, have saved and planned so they could live securely in retirement, but now are uncertain if they will have enough income or adequate medical coverage for the

remainder of their lives. For all our neighbors, near and far, who are living in such liminal times and places, may our prayer be, "Come, Lord Jesus, come!"

In what is known as the High Priestly Prayer which we heard in John's Gospel today, Jesus prays for not only his disciples, but also those who will know him because of their testimony, a prayer that they will be able to pass through the liminal time between the Ascension and Pentecost, and any other time of uncertainty, with faith to know and experience the true oneness of God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - which includes and comforts us all. To his Father Jesus says: "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 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.."

I ask us all to pause a minute to consider - is not the entirety of life a liminal time, a time between the no longer and the not yet? From the moment we learn and understand that our life is finite and we cannot return to the past or make time stand still, we step onto the threshold looking toward the not yet future with only the hope and faith that it will be a more perfect life in Christ. It is here, as we learn to pray "Come, Lord Jesus," that we find even <u>we</u> can stand on shaking ground and walk on a stormy sea, hand in hand with our Lord. And, it is in this liminal place that we find we can extend the hand of Christ to our neighbors in their uncertainty.

My wife and I have a personal motto that we framed and hung on the wall above our kitchen sink. It is one we carefully considered and wrote together. The motto states very simply: "Aspire to be the presence of Christ in the world." As you and I pass the Peace this morning before we share in the Holy Eucharist, I pray that we may come to realize fully that we are not just shaking someone else's hand and greeting him or her, we are extending the hand and love of Christ. We are expressing our unity in our risen Lord. We are supporting one another in our mutual liminality. And as we live into this unity,

may we find that liminal time and space collapse, the future is present now, the kingdom of God is here!

"Come, Lord Jesus!" Come.