

Year C
The Sixth Sunday After Easter
Acts 16:9-15
Revelation 21:10, 21:22-22:5
John 14:23-29

Have you settled in yet?

Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

“Have you settled in yet?” If I had a pound for every time we’ve been asked that question since moving here! And whilst it’s nice for people to care and to take an interest, it does demonstrate how much we as people, for the most part need to be settled. If we describe something as unsettling it has negative connotations, we might describe a bad’s night sleep as, “I couldn’t settle”; those of us in the settled community are slightly suspicious, if we’re honest, of nomads or those constantly on the move. Settling in or settling down are signs of contentment, of having made it, they are very homely sentiments. Our readings this morning are heavy on the sense of building a home, so we might assume they’re heavy on being settled as well. Guess what? They’re not, so settle down and be prepared to be unsettled.

The reading from Acts is a classic case of being unsettled. Paul is impatient to get on with his missionary journeys, so impatient in fact that twice before the reading this morning the Holy Spirit has to stop him from making the wrong

moves. And then this vision happens in the night, the man from Macedonia needing help. After a detailed travel itinerary, we are told that Paul gets to Philippi and meets ... a woman. Hang on minute, it was a man in the vision. We can assume that Philippi was mostly Gentile, Augustus had used it as a colony to resettle soldiers who had been loyal to him, so it had some prestige and wealth. We can also assume that there was no synagogue in the city or Jewish baths, as Paul goes outside to the river. And meets Lydia and the women gathered to pray with her. All of this is unsettling, from Peter's vision and subsequent ministry to Cornelius last week, the Gentiles being part of this new band of followers of Jesus, now fresh from the Council of Jerusalem that affirmed that, Paul meets a wealthy businesswoman who is head of her own household and a Gentile God-fearer. And who doesn't take no for an answer.

She urged Paul, prevailed upon him to come and stay at her home. The rest of Paul's stay in Philippi wouldn't win the city five-star reviews on Tripadvisor, they are persecuted, stripped, beaten, put in prison, released by angels and eventually released by the authorities and implored, not so nicely, to leave. So, it's a wonder that the letter to the Philippians that we have in the NT is so positive. If you've got a spare 15 minutes before your nap this afternoon read it. 8 times Paul mentions rejoicing, 5 times he talks about joy and once he talks about being glad. Something must have gone right in Philippi.

And that, I'd suggest is Lydia, the unsettling answer to Paul's vision. Gentile, God worshipper, attracted to Judaism but not yet converted; dealer in purple cloth, so used to dealing with the elite; head of her own household; and Paul's first convert in Europe. Amazing. But that isn't who Paul saw in his vision. When we think we know the way ahead, when we think we have it sorted, when we think we know who the movers and shakers are, when we are settled, God always unsettles us. A young unmarried peasant girl, a carpenter from Nazareth, a big mouthed fisherman and a bigoted murderer all teach us that we are foolish to write anyone off. We are foolish to settle, too quickly, for the obvious.

Lydia opens her home and gives a home to the European Church. It is this sense of home building, or home crafting, that Jesus is talking about in the Gospel. This is an unsettling episode for the disciples. In John's long farewell discourse this section is prompted by three questions, although for some reason the lectionary sees fit to leave the question out. Jesus is telling the disciples that he has to go, he is preparing them for his leaving. Hugely unsettling, but at the same time promising them that they will build new homes, themselves, that God in Trinity through the Spirit will settle in them, will make their home with them.

Paul will play with this later in his letters when he will call us Temples of the Spirit, places where the divine dwells, where the divine has settled. And we do need to get our heads around that. Our bodies are temples, not because we somehow manage to avoid the temptations of Joyce and other's baking or go to the gym seven days a week, but because God has settled in us through the Spirit. But the settling of God in us is our unsettling.

Since the days of Advent we have been unsettled, waiting for a promise that God would rend the heavens and come down, only to discover that God does so in the form of a baby, who is God with us. A human who restores the dignity of our humanity in the divinity of God. And to be honest we could have settled for a death, a crucifixion, a burial, we understand all that. But the resurrection that is unsettling; the bursting forth from the tomb bursts all we know about how the world works. And we probably could have settled for a resurrected Jesus staying with us and leading us, but the Ascension, which we will celebrate on Thursday, unsettles us even more by taking Jesus physically out of the picture. And if that's not enough Pentecost comes to unsettle the unsettledness as the doors are flung open and we are pushed, like baby birds, out of the nest to go.

The settling of God within us, unsettles us to build the home that testifies to God's presence. By being the place, the people, where God is present, we testify to God's presence. We have become an embodied message of God's love, just as Christ was in the Incarnation. And just as Christ did in his ministry and in his death and resurrection, we elevate the dignity of our humanity through the Spirit. Just as Christ did, so we do now through the Spirit, we build a home where all are welcome. There can be no language of "an island of strangers" in the Church, there are no strangers. There can be no suspicion of those who are different, those who look different, think differently, love differently, worship differently. There can be no pulling up of drawbridges, no turning buildings into museums so that we can settle.

So, have you settled in yet? I hope you have, or will, I pray that we will settle into being the places where God dwells, the bodies that tell of God's love. To be that means that we have to be unsettled enough to be conformed into Christ's likeness, to do away with the things that would stop us being the people God has created us to be. I pray that we will settle into being the people that the Spirit uses to proclaim God's love in word and speech. To do that we need to be unsettled in our daily life, making room for prayer and Bible reading or study, or coming to church. I pray that we will settle into being a home where all can encounter God's love. To do that we need to be

aware of and dismantle the barriers, invisible though some of them might be, that stop people crossing the threshold not just physically but spiritually.

But what will we build in Berwick? That's the question before us. So, settle in, but don't settle down.

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