Acts 16:9-15

Psalm 67

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

John 14:23-29

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

In the ancient church, this period between Easter and Pentecost was a time for the whole community, and especially those newly baptized, to reflect upon how light overcomes darkness, how death gives way to new life, how the bread and the wine made holy become food for the journey. It was a time to rejoice in the new life springing forth from the witness of Jesus’ disciples. Their love for God and for one another bore much fruit. Their witness to Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection attracted others who were seeking the way, the truth and the life. And as these new members learned to abide in Jesus and to experience his abiding presence in their midst, the world around them began to change. And here we are, 21 centuries later, still engaged in living our lives as faith-filled followers of Jesus, still experiencing how God is making all things new.

As Jesus’ disciples, we Christians continue to use these signs and symbols of fire, water, bread and wine, in our worship of the God of our salvation. We also continue to strive as hard as we can to walk in love, as Christ has loved us. Sometimes acting with love is easy. Sometimes it is quite a challenge. But Jesus has promised to be with us always, to lead us and guide us along our pilgrim journey. And Jesus promised that the Father would send us an Advocate, the Holy Spirit.

So, we are not left alone, not left to our own devices, not left out in left field, as it were. Like Paul traveling to far off Macedonia, like John caught up in a vision of heaven on earth, each of us is called to participate in God’s great mission in our own particular way, with our own particular gifts and talents. And God’s call compels us to act. And we always act as part of that great cloud of witnesses, part of that extended community of believers praising the God of all creation by faithfully following Jesus, our crucified and risen Savior.

When we proclaim Jesus as risen from the dead, we will be ridiculed and persecuted, reviled and scorned, just as Jesus was for speaking truth to power. When we act upon our beliefs as disciples of Jesus, we can expect to come up against the world and those things that the world holds as important – power, money, status. When we follow Jesus, we will come face to face with a society that seemingly values things over people: the coolest electronic devices, the latest styles in clothing, the hottest automobiles. But Jesus calls us to embrace a life-giving set of values: honesty and truthfulness, compassion and humility, forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus calls us to serve the poor and the sick, the weak and the homeless, the marginalized and the alien. Jesus calls us to seek justice and reconciliation not only among those we call friends but even more so with those whom we perceive to be our rivals, our opponents, our adversaries. This is what it means to follow Jesus, to proclaim him as our risen Lord and Savior, to shout out, “The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!”

In the readings from the Acts of the Apostles, that we have been hearing since Easter, we are told that after his suffering and death and resurrection, Jesus presented himself alive to the disciples by many convincing proofs – walking with them along the road to Emmaus, showing them the wounds in his hands and side, eating with them by the shore of the lake. After his resurrection, Jesus continued to nurture his disciples, preparing them for his impending departure, opening up their vision to a new future, encouraging them to go out to whole world. He did not want them to feel as if he was going to abandon them or leave them as orphans. So he reminded them that he would always be with them, when they remembered what he taught them and when they did as he commanded. And Jesus further promised that his Father would send them an advocate, a counselor, a champion. God’s Holy Spirit would teach them, as the Spirit continues to teach us, all that we need to know about what it means to follow Jesus. This Advocate unfolds to us in ever new understanding, in ever new interpretation, in ever new application, the once-for-all revelation of Jesus Christ.1

The Acts of the Apostles also tells us what happened after Jesus returned to his Father, and the Holy Spirit came to dwell in our midst. Last week we heard the story about God’s revelation to Peter that all foods were permissible, that spreading the good news beyond the Jewish community was encouraged, that the Holy Spirit would come down upon anyone who opened their hearts to the Good News. This week we heard how God opened the hearts of Lydia and her whole household to Paul’s witness, resulting in their baptism. How is the Holy Spirit continuing to open our hearts to the good news of God in Christ? How is the Holy Spirit prompting us to interpret the signs of the times in light of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection? How are our hearts being opened to new ways of seeing things, to new ways of doing things, to new ways of being St. John’s Episcopal Church?

All of us experience moments of anxiety when life-as-we-know-it is about to change, like when we are contemplating marriage, or changing jobs, or calling a new priest. Such events stir up mixed emotions within us– joy and sadness, pride and apprehension, excitement and anxiety.

We often hold back, hoping that all will remain the same, not wanting to face the uncertainties ahead. But we know that change is a fact of life, whether we like it or not. Our great consolation is in what Jesus said to his disciples, and says to us, “Peace, I leave you. My peace I give you.”

Jesus’ promise of peace is quite different from the peace that the world offers. Jesus’ promise doesn’t depend upon human action. Jesus’ promise is not limited by time or space. Jesus’ promise is unqualified, trustworthy, unwavering.2

So, let’s grab hold of Jesus’ peace in this time of transition and dare to proclaim by word, and especially by example, the good news of God in Christ; that Jesus was born, crucified, and raised from the dead, so that all might be one with God and one with each other. Let us commit ourselves to becoming even better stewards of our time, talents and treasure. Let us boldly reach out in compassion and forgiveness to those within these walls, as well as to those we meet along the pathways of life. Let us work to make St. John’s a place where all are warmly welcomed, where the gifts and talents of all are treasured, where we all come to experience that peace which surpasses all understanding.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

1. http://liturgy.slu.edu/6EasterC052619/theword\_indepth.html
2. https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/easter-6c-2/?type=the\_lectionary\_gospel