

John 17: 20-26

After the supper, and after giving his final teaching to his followers, Jesus prayed to God, saying: "My prayer is for all who will follow me; not only for these few disciples gathered here, but also for all those who will put their trust in me when they hear about me from this lot. I pray that they will all be as one. In the same way as you, Father, are living in me, and I am living in you; I am praying that they will live in us. If they do, then the rest of the world will be able to accept that it was you who sent me. You have given me great honour, and I have passed all the honour on to them, so that they may be as closely united as you and I are. With me living in them, and you living in me, they can reach complete unity. Their unity will allow the rest of the world to recognise that it was you who sent me. It will also demonstrate that you have loved these people as much as you have loved me. Father, my desire for all these people you have given me, is that they will be able to be with me wherever I am. You loved me even before you kick-started the creation of the earth and now you are giving me all the glory, and I want them to be able to say they witnessed it all. Father, you always do what is right and integrity is your middle name. The world does not know you - never has - but I know you, and now these few understand that it was you who sent me. I let them know the truth of who you really are, and I'll continue to do so. In that way, the love you have always had for me will find a home in their hearts too, and I'll be forever a part of them."

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Readings**COCU38C/Easter7C****Psalm 97**

You, LORD, are the ruler of everything! The whole earth celebrates! Up and down the coast, everyone is shouting for joy! Deep, dark clouds of mystery hide you from us; justice and integrity are the bedrock of your rule. You are a consuming fire, leaping in all directions, purging the earth of its enemies. Your touch splits the darkness with bolts of light; the earth is lit up and shakes like a leaf.

You are Lord of all the earth, and in your presence even the mountains go weak and melt like wax. The heavens herald you as the one who puts things right; all people everywhere witness your day of glory. Those who worshipped hollow facades will hang their heads in shame. Those who take pride in the power of possessions will be horrified when it all proves worthless. All these false gods and short-lived saviours crumble and fall before you, the real thing.

From the Temple Mountain to the farthest flung town, your people are celebrating with great joy, O God, because you have seen the truth and brought about justice. You, LORD, are number one in all the universe; in a league of your own, far above anything else that seeks our allegiance. You love those who detest evil, LORD; You stand guard over those who are loyal to you; You come to their rescue if they fall prey to violence.

When people have integrity and do what is right, you light up their lives and fill them with joy. All who build their lives on the bedrock of your truth and justice are celebrating all you do, LORD. Just the mention of your holy name and they burst forth with a flood of gratitude!

Acts 16: 16-34

One day, as we were on our way with Paul to a prayer gathering, we ran into a girl who worked as a clairvoyant. She was a slave: her whole life was controlled by the spirit that enabled her to predict people's futures, and by the money-men who were making a fortune out of her. She began following us around and yelling out, "These men are puppets of the Most High God; here to sell you another way of salvation." She kept this up for days and it was beginning to drive Paul nuts. Eventually he spat the dummy. Turning to her, he gave the spirit that controlled her its marching orders: "On the authority of Jesus Christ I order you to get out of her." And right then and there, she was free of it. This was not a popular move with the money-men who had been exploiting the girl. All they could see was her market value plummeting and their profits going down the drain. They got pretty heavy-handed with Paul and Silas and dragged them into the town square to face the law. The local magistrates were brought in and the men brought their accusations, saying, "These troublemakers are disturbing the peace. They are Jews from a dangerous religious sect and they are recruiting people to a lifestyle that is undermining the family values and Roman laws that make our city strong." That got the crowd fired up, and soon everyone was screaming for blood. The magistrates gave orders to have them publicly beaten. Paul and Silas had the clothing torn from their backs and were viciously bashed with batons. They were then locked up and the prison guard was given orders to do whatever it took to make sure they had no chance of escape. Following his orders, he put them in leg-irons and chained them to the wall in a maximum security cell. In the middle of the night, much to the surprise of the other prisoners, Paul and Silas were sitting up in their cell, praying and singing hymns to God at the top of their voices. Suddenly, a severe earthquake shook the prison so violently that its walls and floors were giving way. The security doors all burst off their hinges and everyone's chains were shattered. The prison guard woke up and, seeing all the doors blown open he naturally assumed that all the prisoners had escaped. Knowing how the authorities would take it out on him, he was about to kill himself and beat them to it, when Paul screamed at him, "Stop! You don't need to kill yourself. We are

all still here!" Grabbing a torch, the guard rushed in to look for himself. Seeing Paul and Silas there, he fell to his knees, shaking like a leaf. When he had pulled himself together, he took them outside and asked, "Sirs, what do I have to do to be saved?" They answered, "Put your trust in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. And the same goes for all your household." The prison guard welcomed them into his own home straight away and washed and dressed their wounds. Paul and Silas shared the Lord's message with him and with all who lived in his house. The response was so eager that before the night was done, the guard and his entire family were baptized. The night turned into quite a party. Paul and Silas were plied with food as the whole household celebrated their new life as people who trusted in God.

Revelation 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20-21

I heard the Lord say: "Look; I'm on my way. I'll be there soon. When I arrive, I'll have the prizes with me and I'll hand them out on the basis of what everyone has done with their lives. I am the whole story, from 'A' to 'Z', Alpha to Omega. I am the first and the last; the opening night and the grand finale. "How good it will be for those who have scrubbed up well. They will be granted unlimited access to the tree of life, to eat its fruits forever. They will be given priority entry rights at the gates of the city. "I am Jesus. It was me who sent the angel to you to deliver this message for the churches. I am the roots of the tree of David, and its ultimate fruit. I am the bright star that heralds the morning."

What other response could we make but "Come on down"? The Spirit says, "Come on down!" The bride prepared for Christ says, "Come on down!" Let everyone who hears this message say it too: "Come on down!" And let all of us who thirst, come on down ourselves. The water of life is available as a free gift to anyone who wants it. The one who has delivered this message and sworn to it, says again, "I kid you not. I am on my way. I'll be there soon." You beauty! Come on down, Lord Jesus! May the extravagant generosity of the Lord Jesus surround everyone and everything! And so say all of us!