

SERMON 23rd May
Rob Lamerton
Sunday 23rd May 2004,
Seventh Sunday of Easter

Readings:

Acts 16: 16-34
Psalm 97 APBA p 324
Revelation 22: 12-22
John 17: 20-26

Read out Acts 16: 16-19

"One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, 'These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.' She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And it came out that very hour."

The young woman was not only oppressed by this illness described here as a "spirit of divination", but was also oppressed by those who made a tidy profit by putting her on display and using her spiritual psychological / emotional condition telling fortunes.

We hear that Paul was "very much annoyed" and commanded the spirit to leave her — it seems in spite of Paul being annoyed and somewhat insensitive, the woman was healed.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them to the market place before the authorities — they accused them of disturbing the city

and advocating customs unacceptable to Romans

and if you think that being in an Iraqi prison has its problems:

Paul and Silas were:

stripped
beaten with rocks
severely flogged
imprisoned
in the innermost cell
and with their feet in stocks.

Their crime! — the healing of a slave girl!

And we note that the opposition to them was commercially motivated

"her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone" but they dressed it up as a cultural/religious difference!

Nowadays, the Christian mission world I hope looks at the economic factors involved

Children are still sold into slavery,

Women are still sold into prostitution

Men too are still slaves to their oppressors

What price their liberation?

And how often is the real reason for events and economic one but dressed up as cultural/religious — The troubles in Northern Ireland were largely one of power and economics

Is the issue of the Palestinians/Israelis the same?

Is there something of this in Iraq?

Is this also an issue between Australia and East Timor over oil?

I am not prone to conspiracy theories, but there appear to be powerful forces at work.

We find in this story there is something of a happy outcome at least for Paul and Silas and their gaoler who finds peace, forgiveness and wholeness in Christ's love.

Unfortunately, we do not hear any more of the young woman... we know nothing of her fate, but it seems that however grudgingly, and annoyed Paul was at her constant harassment...

what the apostle wanted was her liberation — from the spirit and her situation

and ultimately her integration; her own inner unity and peace.

It is that inner unity and integration we all seek —

That sense of being happy and at peace within which is at the heart of the Christian experience.

This week has, I believe, been Schizophrenia awareness week

(and I am not suggesting that the woman had schizophrenia)

schizophrenia may not be the best example, but people who have the condition vary in the level of intensity of their experience but mostly they look for some management of the condition through:

managing stress
adequate sleep

family support
spiritual aspects
 faith, prayers, sacraments, reassurance in love

diet in some cases
exercise
awareness for themselves and those around in the work environment

as well as medication

The same things we all want for our wholeness — for the unity and integratedness of our lives.

[note about the adopted son of CS Lewis. — clinic of Christian spiritual psychotherapy.]

Jesus in the gospel prays for his followers that they may be one. "As you Father, are one in me and I am in you, may they also be in us."

Not only is the unity between the disciples BUT ALSO between the disciple and Jesus and the Father.

The whole issue of Unity of the person flows on to the unity of families, the unity of the church and community

— TO THE WIDER WORLD.

But we cannot expect a united world if we at the local level do not work on our own unity!

When I was in Eden I talked to the local Catholic Priest about building a common church building because both Catholics and Anglicans needed new church buildings. — He said he didn't think it possible to get together with the Anglicans because he had too much trouble getting his own people to work together!

Unity is the theme of this time — Ascension teaches us that Christ is Lord of all things and that under him we are one — if we like it or not! But we are called to live out that unity NOT by avoiding the issues but dealing with them.

Jesus prays for unity but it is in the gift of God's Holy Spirit that unity is enabled. This week we look forward to Pentecost and the outpouring of God's Spirit which makes Christ present. The reading from the Book of Revelation reminds us that as we pray for, and search for, and work for unity, we say "Come Lord Jesus"

BE TRULY PRESENT AMONG US!