

**EASTER 6***Acts 16:9-15***YEAR C***Psalms 67***CROYDON***Revelation 21:10-14, 22-22.5**John 14:23-29*

A little song has been in my mind this week. The catchy little tune just won't go away!

If Acts 16:9-15 had a sound track – this could certainly be it.

*As I went down in the River to pray*

*Studying about that good old way*

*And who should wear the starry crown*

*Good Lord, show me the way*

*O sisters, lets go down*

*Let's go down, come on down*

*O sisters, let's go down*

*Down in the River to pray.*

<https://youtu.be/DbgfQ48hWuY>

**Acts 16:9-15**

I love the energy, enthusiasm and the faith in today's reading from the Book of Acts. The words almost jump off the page! They tell a compelling story:

**Paul's Vision**

Paul had a vision of *'a man of Macedonia pleading . . . and saying 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'*

His response was immediate. *'God has called us to proclaim the Good News to the Macedonians!'*

Now, that is like us dreaming that we should get on a boat and head for New Zealand; or Fiji; or even Tasmania - and immediately doing it. For Paul, Silas, Timothy (and possibly Luke) it was quite a journey; a boat trip from Troas to Samothrace, on to Neapolis and then to Philippi. The journey took them into new territory – into Europe – into Macedonia, a Roman Colony in Northern Greece. How daring was that!

**The reason for the journey was simple.**

*'We immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.'* Paul and his companions were on a mission.

***'Being convinced that God had called us'!*** These are powerful words. They speak to their faith; their hope in the gospel and their confidence in God who communicates, calls and sends. They left *'immediately'*. There was no hesitation in this journey. No matter how challenging, they were on their way.

It's their passion that speaks to me. They were focussed and determined.

How did they tackle their God given task in Philippi, where *'they remained for some days'*? I don't know - but I *do* know what they did on the Sabbath. They went down to the River, looking for what they hoped would be a place of prayer; a place where they then *'sat down with the women who had gathered there.'*

**Holy Encounter**

I don't know whether they ever encountered the man of Macedonia in Paul's vision – but they did encounter **Lydia**; a worshipper of God; a listener; a wealthy business woman from Thyatira who dealt in (very expensive) purple cloth.

Down at the River (the place of prayer and baptism) *'the Lord opened (Lydia's) heart to listen eagerly.'* This is Holy encounter; God breaking into Lydia's life and answering the desire of her heart. Surely this is the desire of *all* of our hearts – to know and be known by God, loved and cherished for ourself.

*'O sisters, lets go down            Let's go down, come on down  
O sisters, let's go down            Down in the River to pray.'*

*O brothers, lets go down            Let's go down, come on down  
Come on brothers, let's go down            Down in the River to pray.'*

### **What was it that first drew Lydia and the other women down to the River?**

What longing of their heart called them to listen to the witness of those who were there and to sit eagerly at the feet of Paul, as he shared the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ? Was Lydia longing for something more in her life; something beyond the wealth and status she already had?

There is something timeless in that personal search. Augustine of Hippo (speaking centuries later) wrote *'You have made us for yourself, O Lord and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.'* (*Confessions, Augustine of Hippo*)

### **Are our hearts restless?**

Have we come down to the River today with longing hearts?

Is the Holy Spirit touching us this morning, speaking words of love, pointing us to Jesus, renewing our faith and hope?

### ***Come, Holy Spirit. Come amongst us today. Renew and empower us.***

I often think about the difference between today's church and that of the first Christians and long for the energy and vitality of Paul's time (though I'd rather not be thrown into prison or go on perilous sea journeys.) How I wish that we could renew our zeal.

Do people seek *us* out, drawn to hear more about God's extraordinary love for them?

Do they come, do *we ourselves come*, to hear teaching that will strengthen and encourage us on our life's journey? Are we here with restless hearts, searching for the source of love, convinced (like Lydia) that there is something more in life than possessions, money, status or power?

### ***Come, Holy Spirit. Come amongst us today. Renew and empower us.***

Paul's life-giving beautiful message of God's forgiveness, grace and love is ours to enjoy and share. It is the treasure of our life, God's gracious answer to every restless heart.

Stir us Lord. Open our hearts. Open our eyes. Open our ears.

Give us energy, courage, commitment and zeal. Like Paul, let us act immediately when we discern your call – putting no barrier in the way - convinced of Jesus' call to proclaim the good news of your love and forgiveness to all.

Loving God be with us and meet us, as we go down to the River to pray.