

Acts 16:9-15 • Psalm 67 • Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5 • John 14:23-29 • Easter 6 • Year C  
• May 9, 2010 • St. Thomas, Hanover, New Hampshire

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we celebrate the sixth Sunday of Easter. Six weeks is also the length of Lent. I don't know about you, but for me, these Easter season weeks have had an entirely different feel from the Lenten six weeks. Some of it is the turn of weather, I'll admit, but I also think that our heads are in a different place on this side of Easter. Outlook, feel, perspective are all words that we use to name how we nuance our experience of the world. Perspective matters and our scripture lessons today help us to see how this is so.

In the reading from Acts, we heard about Paul's vision which he understood to be God calling him to a new mission in a part of the world where he had not yet been: Macedonia. Reading along in the book of Acts, we notice that it is here, in this story, that the pronouns change from third person "they" to first person "we." Now the narrative is a primary source, a first-hand observation. The on-going story of the missionaries is now told from the author's own perspective, which lends immediacy and clarity to the details.

Towards the end of the reading, we learn about Lydia, a businesswoman. Her heart was opened by God to truly hear what Paul had to say. She responded, was baptized and urged the missionaries to stay at her home. "And she prevailed upon them." This part of the story is told from her perspective in the sense that she is the main actor. All the actions begin with her and move outward. The text does not say that she urged them to stay and they did, even though that is what happened. But that wording would emphasize a mix of actors, a balance of give and take. By saying "she prevailed upon us," the author

lets the reader know that this is all about Lydia. It was her enthusiasm, her eagerness, her urgency that motivated the action. The perspective of the story conveys the direction of the action. Her hospitality reached out and encircled Paul and the others, and they had to comply. The author experienced Lydia's prevailing as more important than their decision to stay. Her sense of commitment and urgency is translated to the reader as if it were an entity, full of energy and spirit.

Reflecting on the direction of an action can be very helpful as a way to assess the significance that we place upon the action. Our perspective depends in large part on which direction we are facing. This insight informs our internal selves as well as our physical, external selves.

For example, remembering is an action that shifts its significance depending upon our perspective. One way to remember is to bring the past to the present for the purpose of going back into the past. This direction of remembering has a backward looking focus with a goal of remaining with our memories in their place of origin. We go back to a certain static place.

A different way to remember is to bring the past to the present for the purpose of using the significance of the past to push into the future. In this way of remembering, our memories provide motivation and inspiration to move forward. This is what we believe Jesus meant when he said "Do this in remembrance of me." It isn't in the act of eating the bread and drinking the wine that we discover the climax of the remembrance. The climax is what we do afterwards. Our perspective, that is, the direction that our heart is facing,

(either inward or outward) is a determining factor in how we understand the significance of what we do at Eucharist.

How we remember also contributes to the quality of the process by which we grow older. When we use remembering as a way to prolong the past, we attempt to hold ourselves in a fixed place. A more productive perspective allows us to live fully into the new life of each and every day, fueled/motivated by all that has been our past. Hope grows out of this perspective, moving us forward beyond today and tomorrow into a future that we do not need to worry about.

John's vision tells us that God is fully present in our future. He declares that the heavenly city Jerusalem will have no temple. No place will have to be designated for God to reside because God will be abundantly with all. God's presence will not be a spark or a glimmer, but will overwhelm the need for any other kind of light. This is our hope for the kingdom of God and our encouragement for the here and now. With the perspective of encouraged and hopeful creatures, we are challenged to move through our days toward the fulfillment of the kingdom of God. Turned toward the heavenly city, we can look beyond discouragement and any evil to what is good in our world. "We are [blessed] to turn with confidence to the God who, though ... seated on the throne, is the gracious God who wipes away every tear from our eyes." [*Sacra Pagina*, Wilfrid J. Harrington, O.J. p. 220]

How should we accomplish this? Ah, here is the last of the words affected by perspective that I will mention today—the word 'should.' The negative 'should' is defined in terms of regret, looking back. 'I should have done...' whatever. It feels like a burden because we cannot do anything to change it. Like the other examples of

perspective, this ‘should’ is backward looking and cements us in a certain time and place. In terms of the future, ‘should’ can be the energy of possibility and commitment. Encased in resolve, this ‘should’ can be a springboard. Pop psychology tells us that there are no shoulds; we’ll only make ourselves feel bad. I disagree. Jesus said, “Those who love me will keep my word...” Christians have a commitment and responsibility to work for the kingdom of God and that involves some obedience, also known as ‘what we should do.’ But Jesus goes on to make it very clear that he and the Father are with us, not temporarily, but will indeed make their home with us.

And the promised Holy Spirit will continue to teach us and remind us of what Jesus said. We’re not doing the work of the kingdom on our own. This is part of why I believe our gathered community is so important for our blessing. Jesus’ assurances were for our peace. The peace available to us is now and moving forward. Jesus gave us *his* peace, which for him was vast enough and steadfast enough to strengthen him for all that he would go through. So many years after the fact, we live in the paradox of the absence of Jesus and still claim his presence with us. The bridge through that paradox is the promised Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Comforter. God still says to us, “Do not let your hearts be afraid.”

We link ourselves together when we cultivate an outward and forward-facing perspective. We are not alone. Author Anthony de Mello tells a story about “a man who was looking for a good church to attend. He happened to enter one in which the congregation and the preacher were reading from their prayer book. They were saying, “We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those

things which we ought not to have done.” The man dropped into a seat and sighed with relief as he said to himself, ‘Thank goodness, I’ve found my crowd at last.’” [Anthony de Mello, *The Song of the Bird*]

When we confess our sins, it isn’t with a sense of being stuck with them, even though confession, by its very nature, is full of ‘oughts’ and ‘shoulds.’ But by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are forgiven, comforted, and empowered to move beyond our sins.

When Jesus said “I am going away and I am coming to you,” his perspective is complete. When we are turned toward him as he is fully with God and fully with us, his presence brings us peace and sends us out, unafraid, to do God’s work in the world.

Amen.