

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections  
based on this week's lectionary readings

June 2, 2019  
Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year C

The readings this week:

◦ Acts 16:16-34 ◦ Psalm 97  
◦ Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21 ◦ John 17:20-28



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## The Heartbeat of a Community

An [article from The New York Times](#) a few years ago reported on a small study from a small town, that bore intriguing results. San Pedro Manrique in Spain is known for its annual fire-walking ritual. Villagers turn out en masse, along with lots of spectator-tourists. Researchers were interested in exploring how people connected around community ceremonies, and whether there were any physical/biological responses to the experience. There was some resistance to the testing, but eventually the investigators convinced several fire-walkers, people who were related to fire-walkers by family or friendship, and spectators who were from out of town to wear heart rate monitors. The results surprised the scientists.

The heart rates of friends and families were very closely associated with those of the fire-walkers, while the heart rates of the spectators were not. This was true before, during, and after the ritual. One conclusion that might be drawn from the experiment is that when we know people well, we have deeper empathy for them and their situation.

You've seen this if you've ever attended a music recital or youth sporting event. When your own child is at the piano, you lean forward in your chair and listen for every note that you've heard a million times in your living room. If he hits a wrong chord, you feel it in your bones. When the teen at the free throw line is your daughter, or niece, or a friend's kid, you watch more intently and feel the success or failure more deeply.

The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one... [from John 17]

When the heart of God beats within us, our own hearts want to join with the hearts of others, that we may be one. We forget this to our spiritual peril when we fail to empathize with people of another race, nationality or language, home town, sexual orientation or gender identity, income status, or religion. If we view news footage of refugees fleeing danger and we don't feel anything, we have silenced the heart of God that makes us one. If we hear the stories of people who are

struggling from the actions of others and we don't sense a connection to their pain, then we have some reconnecting to do with God's heart.

It is the heartbeat of God that makes our hearts beat together, that brings us into unity despite our differences to care for both neighbor and stranger. As our hearts learn to beat in union, humanity grows closer to the solidarity and peace every heart desires.

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Ah, Lord God, thou holy lover of my soul, when thou comest into my soul, all that is within me shall rejoice. Thou art my glory and the exultation of my heart; thou art my hope and refuge in the day of my trouble. Set me free from all evil passions, and heal my heart of all inordinate affections; that being inwardly cured and thoroughly cleansed, I may be made fit to love, courageous to suffer, steady to persevere. Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing more courageous, nothing fuller nor better in heaven and earth; because love is born of God, and cannot rest but in God, above all created things. Let me love thee more than myself, nor love myself but for thee; and in thee all that truly love thee, as the law of love commandeth, shining out from thyself.  
Amen

~ Thomas a Kempis 1380-1471,  
*Oxford Book of Prayer*

\_\_\_ 1st Reading: [Acts 16:16-34](#)



How does it feel to put yourself in the place of each of these characters in the story? What do we learn about the people in this story who are on the edges of what's happening? What mission are you on in your church, and what is at the heart of it? When has singing hymns helped to sustain you? Is Paul's undone work left to later times and cultures, and if so, what is left for us to do, in our own time? [Weekly Seeds](#)

\_\_\_ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 97](#)

What is the effect of God's presence on nature? On mankind? On Zion? On You? Enumerate God's promises and commands for those that love him. How can you appropriate them in your life? How do you rejoice that the Lord reigns? In what ways have you noticed that creation declares God's righteousness? What does the Psalmist say those who love the Lord hate? Why? [This Day with God, Deborah H Bateman](#)



The 7th Sunday of Easter is the imposed pause, the anticipation of the promise, the flash of insight before the work of Pentecost begins. The church, not quite ready to be church, is asked to go deeper into love these ten days of Ascensiontide. You are asked to practice loving in dark faith, without the bodily presence of the Resurrected Christ.

Like Mary Magdalene on the first day of the week, you go to the empty place expecting nothing but find everything. Like the Dark Night of the Soul, you ache for your loss only to experience love's consummation. You grope your way "with no other light than the one burning in my heart" toward that open, sunlit field "leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies" in union with God (John of the Cross). Easter is the wedding feast, and Ascension the nuptial chamber.

In Ascensiontide we're called in dark faith to a deeper conversion, to our vocation to holiness. We ask to be "fit for love", that dangerous call to the universal love conferred to us in Pentecost. Our union with God impels and strengthens us to love. "I am the one who makes you to love; I am the one who makes you to long; I am the one, the endless fulfilling of all true desires." Julian of Norwich.

May God make us all fit for love. Amen.

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

### Praying Toward Sunday

Father of all who live in the Spirit,  
you have brought unity through your Son Jesus Christ:  
help all who profess his name to show in their lives,  
in their worship,  
and their evangelism  
that oneness which springs from the truth  
as it is found in Jesus,  
and fill your church with the desire  
both to seek and find that unity  
throughout the world; in his name. Amen.

~ Michael Seward, [The Jubilate Group](#)

\_\_\_ 3rd Reading: [Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21](#)

How do you respond to the fact that Jesus is coming back? What does it mean to you that Jesus keeps His word and He shall return? Christ wants us to love Him, not what is wicked and that will only destroy us. So, why does He put so much passion and effort in it? Are we worth it? John was honest about his frailties. How can this be a reminder to us to learn from our mistakes so we can be more faithful and loyal to Christ? Why would someone not want to admit their mistakes? How can you use your mistakes? What does it mean to you to be content in Christ? Why are so many of us miserable, even though we are Christians? How does this compare to not being a Christian and being disillusioned by the ways of the world? What can you do better to be content in Him? How can you better use God's Word to develop your faith so you are more ready for His return? [Into Thy Word](#)

\_\_\_ 4th Reading: [John 17:20-26](#)

What would you say to your loved ones if you had just a few days left to live? In verses 20-26, Jesus is praying for us. How do we know this? What stirs your heart when you consider that Jesus prays for you? Many Christians go through seasons where they struggle to believe that God really loves them. Have you gone through this? How does this passage help a believer who's struggling in this way? The words Jesus prays here give a wonderful testimony that Jesus holds us fast for all eternity. Where do you see this truth in our passage? Why does Jesus want us to overhear His prayer to the Father? Is the vision for unity that Jesus expresses in this prayer impossible? In the same passage that Jesus prays for His people to be unified, He also prays frequently about our union with Him. How are these two themes connected? Have you dealt with broken relationships with other Christians? What are some of the common barriers to unity that you've experienced? How can those barriers be overcome? [The Orchard](#)