



## SERMONS THAT WORK

**Easter 6  
Year C**

### **Such Good Things**

**[RCL]: Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14:23-29 or John 5:1-9**

*O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

The collect for the sixth Sunday after Easter ascribes to God—and only God—the desire to give us all good things that surpass our understanding, that exceed all that we can desire. How is that possible?

Much of the time, we live lives that are a compromise between happiness and sorrow, joy and discouragement. This roller coaster kind of existence is a challenge to our faith and a denial of good things that surpass our understanding, and God knows this.

The whole of Easter has been about equipping us with powerful faith tools to defeat the forces that would drag us down. There are post-Resurrection stories of a group of defeated fishermen who end up going back to their lives of fishing, only to discover the risen Jesus meeting them for breakfast. There are the travelers walking to Emmaus encountering a stranger who turns out to be Jesus, who breaks bread with them. They discover their hearts gladdened. These are experiences opened to us, too.

So, where do these good things come from? You can't place an Amazon order for them, no, but you can hear them, experience them, and find them in the faith community. The early Christians learned they could face persecution, possible arrest, trial, and even execution because of the power of the resurrection they found in the Easter community. They also learned that what happened to them was of little account, because they placed themselves under the gracious God who delivered them from the pall of darkness in their lives.

Today, we hear about Lydia, a woman of obvious wealth – purple cloth was used for high officials and nobility – and how she embraces Paul and invites him to come and stay in her house. She knows something is missing in her otherwise successful life, and when she hears about Jesus, she discovers an abundant God who fills the empty place in her heart, and she invites God in.

And we listen as Jesus teaches the disciples about what will happen after he leaves them. God will send an advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will do two things: teach and remind.

The Spirit will teach us how God desires and gives us the good things we need, even when we don't know what they are or how to ask for them. A man named Mark started coming to church because his business was failing. He couldn't separate the business failure from his feeling that he was a failure as well. In a short while, people who had been strangers began to talk to him, sit and drink coffee with him, and one older woman who owned a small business offered to help him develop a business plan. In less than a year, his business began to show a profit. In a practical way, he was taught how God loved him and desired good things for him and gave him the guidance and wisdom he needed.

The Spirit will also remind us, especially when things are not going well, what really matters and to whom we belong. The faith community is the place where we are restored, not in just a feel-good way, but in the depths of our hearts. The sign of the cross, the breaking of the bread at communion, the hymns (read the words even if you don't sing), and the Scriptures are all reminders of how much we are loved and cherished and redeemed. As a wise bishop once said, "Human beings solve problems; God redeems messes." All of us think we can fix things, but often messes overwhelm us. We are reminded, as the disciples were after the death of Jesus, that God redeems messes – and that includes each of us.

Good things have been turned into a commodity. They are scarce, and you have to be able to pay for them. At least that is what we are told by ads and even stories in the news. Go to this doctor or lawyer, get treated at this cancer center, buy this or that appliance for comfort in your home – the list is endless – and expensive.

God has another way that is based on abundance. God gives us what we need, always providing for us those things which cannot be bought or bargained for. They are things that endure, such as hope, faith, love, fellowship, and friends. They are qualities like peace and wisdom and courage. God gives us these gifts through the Spirit, and God also gives the ability to find them in others. The world is full of them, though often they are masked by our focus on the news of anger and darkness.

So, here are some ways you can, like Lydia, be faithful to the Lord and receive the abundance of good things God has for you:

- 1) Expect them. The Beloved, the one who created you, the one at whose birth the angels sang, loves you. So, begin to expect good things. They are not earned as much as they are bestowed. And perhaps you have neglected to see them right there in front of you in the person you love, the people you work with, and the beauty that surrounds you daily. The more you find yourself saying, "God will bless this in the intended way," the more you will see it happen.
- 2) When you are discouraged or feeling alone, remember that this is in part a gift from God as well. Sometimes we are given experiences that remind us of how dependent we are on the risen Lord.

- 3) Read the collect we prayed for the sixth Sunday of Easter (page 225 in the Book of Common Prayer) daily for one week, and you will begin to see your attitude about the world and the creation change to a more positive and peaceful frame of mind.
- 4) This week, the Episcopal Church honors Rogation Days, the days of planting and hallowing of creation. So, plant something – a tree or a plant or even a seed, and nurture it. This will reconnect you with the earth and the blessings of creation, and it will remind you that we are all dependent on the rain and the soil and the sun given by the Creator for us all.
- 5) Determine you are going to reduce your contribution to the world's waste problem and ask God to guide you in your actions so that it becomes a partnership with God and others. It will also honor the creation as God's gift.
- 6) Expect more serenity in your life. Serenity is a quality often denied us, but much of the time we deny it to ourselves. God wants our lives to be lived in serenity, but we have to claim it as a gift so freely given. Recite the serenity prayer: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

The “good things [that] surpass our understanding” are waiting to be claimed and celebrated by all of us. Awaken to their presence, claim them as your spiritual inheritance, and live them in witness to the risen Lord.

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