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“It is better for you that I go” (John 16:7).

*Acts 16:22-34; John 16:5-11*

In his *Redbook*, Mao Tse Tung describes perfect leadership as a project after which the workers say, “Look at what we have done.” Good leadership is not always strong or direct, but more a way of fostering initiative and ownership. One of the more predictable crises in an organization led by a strong, charismatic leader is what happens when that person dies or steps aside. Are his or her followers prepared to take up their roles with confidence and creativity?

When the disciples faced the departure of Jesus, they felt helpless and frightened. How could they possibly continue his preaching and teaching ministry? But he tells them it is better for them that he goes, for if he remains the Advocate cannot come. He is speaking of his Holy Spirit, who will come not as an external focus of guidance but will enter their own spirits, enlighten their minds and fill their hearts with the power to continue the work of Jesus. If Jesus remains with them, this transfer will not occur.

The Acts of the Apostles repeats the story of Jesus in the lives of his followers. They do everything he did, including miracles of healing and feats of courage and freedom they could not have imagined during the time he was with them. In today’s first reading, Paul and Silas are unstoppable as they preach the Gospel. Even when arrested, beaten and thrown in the maximum-security cell of a prison, chained to the floor and surrounded by guards, they are liberated by an earthquake. It is a repeat of the resurrection of Jesus.

Only by taking up the mission despite their trepidation and doubt would the Apostles have realized they had the power that Jesus had promised them. As every kind of obstacle was placed before them, they learned that they had everything they needed to carry out Jesus' command to take the Gospel to new and unknown lands. Their awe at what had happened to the crucified and risen Jesus had to be appropriated and demonstrated in their own ministries. Thus, the Acts of the Apostles became the real springboard of the Gospel from Jesus into the world.

People love strong leaders in part because they carry the decisions, planning and responsibility for the group. But discipleship always involves discernment about what the Spirit is saying to us within our own circle of relationships and activities. Jesus indwells us through his Spirit, and we become his hands, feet, face and agency in our daily lives. As small as our role may seem, grace will find opportunities only we can respond to, and we may never know the effects of our openness to others in ordinary ways. Let our days end in gratitude for the chance to build the Kingdom of God in our own corner of the world, one act of love at a time.

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