

"Jail Ministry" - Acts 16.22-34 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

There are a couple of options for pastors to preach today. Some will use this day to remember Jesus' ascension into heaven according to Acts 1. (It occurred forty days after Easter which was on Thursday if you missed it.) But I decided to keep focusing on the stories of the disciples Peter and Paul to help lead us to the Day of Pentecost next Sunday.

I see care and compassion in the story that touches on the care and compassion in each of us. And I see a relevance for those involved in jail ministry today. I have done that in a couple churches located near jails and prisons. Paul and Silas are in the midst of a group of prisoners who must have been listening to them praying and singing while they were all in jail together. In bad situations, have we been blessed with songs and prayers shared by others? Who has tried to make the best of bad situations for you? Who has maybe sung lullabies to comfort you? Who has prayed fervently for you? To a degree, Paul and Silas cared for these other prisoners while they were imprisoned with them. It is most evident to me that when the earthquake came and the chains were gone, the other prisoners did not flee or even try to escape, they stayed near the safety and protection they must have found in the comforting presence and faith of Paul and Silas. Jesus himself reflected a similar image of caring when he said, *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You who kill the prophets and stone those who were sent to you. How often I wanted to gather your people together, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings."* (Matthew 23.37)

And then we encounter the jailer about to kill himself! Friends, there are people among us and out there today who feel exactly like this jailer. They think suicide is the answer to whatever problem they do not want to face, or feel they no longer can deal with. Friends, alcohol or drugs are not the answer. Suicide is not the answer. Paul and Silas knew the answer. Do you? I have told some of you the answer! People will often ask me, "Pastor, can I ask you a question?" Back in the day, I used to point out that they already did. "Pastor, can I ask you a question?" is a question! But that out is not helpful. So now, I usually say, "Yes! And the answer is Jesus!" Jesus is the answer! Paul and Silas knew that, and they prayed and sang and then shouted to the jailer! At the worst of times Paul calls out to him – stops him from killing himself physically. But, think about it, spiritually Paul offers him a sort of hospice care to allow him to die to his old way of thinking and living, in order to become fully alive in Christ. Paul and Silas are able to lead him and his whole family to rebirth as they are baptized in the name of Jesus! This is another story of "us and them" - jailers and prisoners or imprisoned and free. In a sense Paul and Silas were free and the jailer was imprisoned by his old ways, until he was "born again." He was set free from his bondage to guilt and sin, and welcomed along with his whole family into the family of faith.

For Paul, prison walls and chains did not bind him, in Christ he was set free. But he preached against the status quo and the rules and regulations that bound up the culture and society. Later when he returned to Jerusalem he was imprisoned again and this time King Agrippa hears his case which ends with Paul's hope that the king would be set free to believe Jesus is the answer. *Agrippa said to Paul, "Are you trying to convince me that, in*

such a short time, you've made me a Christian?" Paul responded, "Whether it is a short or a long time, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today will become like me, except for these chains." (Acts 26:28-29)

Paul would appeal to Caesar and be taken in chains to Rome where he was martyred for his faith. On Memorial Day we remembered military personnel who died for their country, today let us also remember those who have been imprisoned and even killed for their faith. Prayerfully consider what we might do to care for people today.

Who do you know, that might need a little care today? Who is bound up or imprisoned by various things in their life? What might you do to help set them free? Make a difference for someone. Have a blessed day by making it a blessed day for others. Alleluia and Amen.

Paul Was in a Prison Cell

Jeffrey B. Childs 5/21/25

Paul was in a prison cell,
And though he was mistreated,
With his soul, all was well,
His faith was not defeated.

In the night he sang and prayed,
When an earthquake came.
Though an escape could have been made,
Paul remained all the same.

The jailer feared all would escape,
And he would be to blame.
But new life for him was taking shape,
By believing in Christ's name.

New life came when he believed,
Paul baptized him and his family.
The prisoners' wounds he then relieved.
In Christ all are set free.