

Read also Psalm 59:9-17

As you heard the story this morning, which was so beautifully told by Jim Stahl, I wonder if you thought about what moved Paul and Silas to take this second missionary journey. Before this journey began, they prayed, and then they laid their plans.

We'll go here . . . no, the Holy Spirit said, not going to Asia.

Then they thought, we'll go to Bithynia . . . no, the Holy Spirit said, not going there. That night Paul had a vision of a man saying "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" And so they set out immediately, following the lead of the Holy Spirit. They went to an important Roman colony in Europe.

How would it be to live that way – life directed each day by the Holy Spirit? A friend upon hearing this passage was drawn by the passion. *I want to have that kind of passion*, she said. "What stops you," I asked. "Everyday life," she replied. I imagine you can relate.

These believers were indeed sold out. They were driven by the mission.

You heard the story. (If not, please stop and read Acts 16:16-34). Imagine how it felt. They were going one way, the Holy Spirit says 'no, go here,' and they end up being beaten with rods and imprisoned. So much for following the Holy Spirit!

But did you notice something about Paul and Silas in prison?

Did you notice their *passion*?

They lived out what we said in our Call to Worship: "I trust in the LORD for protection. So why do you say to me, "Fly like a bird to the mountains for safety!"

Their passion kicked in when they saw a young girl who couldn't "fly to the mountains for safety" or even escape in any way because she was in all kinds of bondage.

After observing her for several days, Paul became grieved by her bondage. She followed them, I believe, because they truly did have the words of life. As he began to understand her exploitation, Paul was deeply disturbed, indignant because of the poor girl's condition. Jesus has something to say about believers who care about oppression. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Mt 5:6). The word for "righteousness" can also be translated "justice." Paul hungered for the girl to be treated justly.

Are you outraged by injustice? Do you too have a sense of righteous indignation when you see others being used or exploited? Does it make you mad when you see abuse? If so, you might find yourself following Paul's path.

And so Paul took Satan on; he cast out the demon and freed the girl.

Nothing is more joyful than seeing someone freed. Freedom occurs on many levels. Do you understand the freedom we experience in the US? That freedom is so prevalent that we hardly notice. But freedom is often threatened in the world today. Egypt is a current example as its citizens have been fighting against tyranny. This is nothing new.

If you were at George Cowand's memorial service on Sunday you heard the story from a man who fought in WWII. He talked about the day the Allies signed the treaty liberating France and ending the war. There was great celebration. The band in which George played was called to play the "Victory Polka." Freedom is highly important; God celebrates freedom. This victory over Satan was something to celebrate.

But her owners were not celebrating; oh no, a counter attack ensued. Those malevolent men, upon seeing their profits fizzle right before their eyes went after Paul and Silas with vengeance.

Any time you do good, anytime you take a stand against injustice, expect to be maligned in some way. But you do not have to, "Fly like a bird to the mountains for safety!" Because the Psalmist says, "The LORD still rules from heaven. He watches everyone closely, examining every person on earth" (11:4).

But, it didn't really seem like God was doing anything as the men lied about them; the authorities didn't even investigate the truth, the town turned against them, they were severely beaten with rods, and then imprisoned.

Paul later would describe it like this in 1 Thessalonians:

"You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi . . . and how much we suffered there. Yet our God gave us the courage to declare his Good News to you boldly, in spite of great opposition. So you can see we were not preaching with any deceit or impure motives or trickery" (1 Thess 2:2-3).

When we take a stand for what we believe in as Christians, we come against an enemy of darkness. We fight a war, and when victory is won it is right to celebrate.

The two of them even with backs bleeding, legs in stocks, were praising God's victory; despite their own injuries they were whooping it up over seeing that girl set free. Yes, those evil men would never exploit that girl again.

What hymns do you suppose they sang?

Onward Christian Soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus, going on before!
Christ the royal Master, leads against the foe;
Forward into battle, see His banners go.

They had been pulled aside to do battle in Macedonia and they were glad to take their stand.

Would you have been singing in jail? Or cursing because of your own experience of injustice? How did Paul and Silas experience that kind of joy? What was their frame of reference?

Paul writes: “For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts” (1 Thess 2:4).

God was their commander. So Paul was not defeated by negative circumstances. How free he was, even in chains.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they are the children of God.” Sometimes we have to take our stand against evil to bring peace.

Well, how does God take care of us when circumstances are dire?

The answer is *powerfully*. God shook that place with a powerful earthquake; like at the cross the moment Jesus died, a powerful earthquake caused the curtain in the temple to split from top to bottom (Mt 27:51-54). And, the morning Jesus was raised from the dead a great earthquake occurred as an angel rolled the stone away from the mouth of the tomb (Mt 28:2). The earthquake in the jail signified God at work; God intervening in a very real way.

You can acknowledge these events as divine activity or not, but the truth is, help was on the way. Victory was upon them! They were about to see the most amazing turnaround when an incredible peace and calm came over that jailhouse, due to the influence of their faith – as none of the prisoners left. No riot or chaos; there was peace.

All those factors – faith, joy, prayer, powerful earthquake, peace not chaos, made the jailer say . . .

I want that!

He recognized, that’s true freedom. That’s peace. That’s salvation!

“Sirs,” he said, kneeling before Paul and Silas, “What must I do to be saved?”

The man stepped into freedom.

The first thing he did was give the care he had neglected before. He washed the men’s wounds; he fed them and introduced his family to them; he rejoiced with them. Salvation, you see, is reflected in open hearts of giving to others. He received from God – and he immediately gave.

Did you notice the passion? No half-heartedness here. These believers had a real vision of what being a Christian is all about. They were sold out, giving themselves wholly to God. Are you willing to give yourself wholeheartedly to God?

When you give yourself to God, it always pays off. They experienced extraordinary miracles – setting many people free and being set free from fear themselves.

You will experience miracles and freedom too.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

AMEN