

Reflection for Sunday on Acts 16:16-34

Paul and Silas in Prison

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

Freedommm!!!

How many different meanings of the word free do you know? Free speech and free cake are both good — especially when the latter is gluten free! (for me, at least).

This section of Acts speaks to our sense of freedom, and the liberation we find in Christ.

- In this passage we encounter a slave who is twice possessed — she has a demon, and has owners — by the end she is at least *demon-free*.
- After freeing the slave from her demon, Paul and Silas are denied their *free speech* and then incarcerated, but *God then frees them*.
- The prison guard feels compelled, on his honour, to take his own life, but Paul *saves* him from this awful fate and the combined effect of the miraculous earthquake and chain-loosening, together with the Christians' integrity, brings him to discover his own *freedom in Christ*, through faith and baptism.

Faith should always be like this for us — Christ frees us from the penalty of sin and changes our character so we are no longer, as Paul puts it, 'slaves to sin.' Prayer can make us stress-free (or at least reduce it) as we share our burdens with the Lord. For many of us God opens up new avenues by his grace, we can find freedom in his plan for us. And, in his great, unconditional love, we are not straightjacketed into stereotypes but free to be ourselves.

Finally — the freedom that Paul and Silas found affected those around them too! In God's power they could gift freedom. In prison they preached Christ crucified, and their word was backed up with an earthquake and loose chains — we don't know what the other prisoners thought at the end of that night, but they had an experience they would never forget. And so it is with us — the grace we find in Christ should bless others, some of whom we may know nothing about.

***All blessings,
Tim.***

This coming Sunday we have three different kinds of services to suit three different needs — all should be considered to be 'benefice' services, inasmuch as everyone from across the benefice is very welcome at each service.

- The first service, at 9.30 in Theberton is a Healing service, led by Tina Neal. Anyone who wants prayer for healing, for themselves, or perhaps someone else close to them should feel free to come to this. It will be a quiet, gentle and prayerful service.
- At 11am in Peasenhall we will have our one communion service — this will be common worship, (not Book of Common Prayer), and all are welcome.
- At 6pm at Westleton we will hold an informal service, featuring band-led worship music, a talk and prayer. All are welcome, especially those looking for worship with a more informal and contemporary feel.