April 22, 2018 Paul and Silas Acts 16:16-34 (Luke 6:18-19, 22-23) Liturgical color: White

PRAYER OF THE DAY God of freedom, Paul and Silas worshiped you, even when they were flogged and imprisoned. Transform our hearts so that we may also rejoice in you at all times and in all situations. Amen.

HYMNS You have put on Christ ELW 211, UMH 609 When our song says peace ELW 709 When in our music God is glorified ELW 850/851 CHORAL Blest are they, William Beckstrand

Luke 6: 18 They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. 19 And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

 20 Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

 21 "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "**Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.**  22 "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

**Prayers:**

* Thank God for Greyson, his parents Christian and Nina; his godparents Jonathan and Nikki, his water bearer “Nana” (Irene) and his grandparents including Kuku (whom you know as Kay) and Jeff Schlegel… thank God for gathering all of us as part of the family of God here at St. Daniel’s today.
* Thank God for surgery done and healing for Lori Small and Terry Williams
* Prayers for Grace Schittler scheduled to have surgery this week
* *Birthdays and anniversaries*

**Announcements before worship:**

We have a lot to talk about today; but we will do those announcements at the end of today’s service. First, we will worship the God who has brought us together as a church family, the God who brings us through all things, the God who gave himself to live among us, to sacrifice himself for us, the God who was willing to die and the God whom even death cannot overcome! The God who gives us the gift of baptism through which we are brought from death into new live, and even life everlasting. This is the God we prepare to worship as we listen to the prelude this morning.

*(Do dismissal first so acolyte, baptismal family etc. can be free to move and listen as needed)* **Announcements after worship:**

There is cake to celebrate Greyson’s baptism, as part of fellowship today, please stay and get to know our newest member of the body of Christ!

Even as one member is joined to this body, I do need to share news of resignations from this St. Daniel’s part of the body of Christ.

 On Tuesday, Marsha Walmer resigned. At Wednesday’s Council meeting, Marsha’s position as Co-Council president was filled by new council member Lu Page. (*thank you /applause*) As you can see on the back of the bulletin’s cover, this still leaves us with an open seat on council, since Lu is filling Bob Preston’s seat. Council has chosen to leave this opening vacant presently.

Many of you should have also received a letter from me, bearing my resignation from this congregation so that I may take care of my emotional health. I’ll read this to you now, so that I might keep the wording consistent, and maybe get through this… {*read*}.

{April 22 sermon notes: *From working preacher commentary: “we Christians have an abundance of God’s grace, filling our lives with meaning and purpose even in times when it seems everything is against us.”}*

In the gospel we heard a small sample of the teaching and healing of Jesus. People came to hear his teaching and to be physically healed of diseases, and of unclean spirits… sometimes we think of these as mental health diseases including depression and addiction. Simply touching Jesus was enough to heal people!

And Jesus went deeper into his healing message for this crowd which included those who were sick and tormented, and rich and poor, and hungry and satiated, and those who were laughing as well as those who were weeping. In that crowd gathered by Jesus were people who were reviled, and excluded, people who were defamed and those who were honored, and respected, included and held in high esteem. We stopped reading just before all the woes of warning to those who are comfortable with all the benefits of society’s abundance.

Because today we will not focus on abundant material wealth, we will not focus on abundant entitlement in society, we will not even focus much on healing… because today’s readings begin in prison, they begin with injustice, they continue in fear, and excessive oppression… and the Living Word of God is right in the midst of the mess!

The church sign at Calvary in Sinking Spring summarizes this thought well saying: “life with God is like Spring… messy and beautiful!”

Paul and Silas were continuing the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus here in Philippi (Greece) years after Easter the Ascension and Pentecost, and hundreds of miles from the Promised Land.

I need to point-out that this location was NOT the apostles chosen destination. Apostles are called ‘sent ones’ for a reason. (Acts 16:6-12) They had gone from town to town in Phrygia and Galatia

“**having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit** to speak the word in Asia (modern day Greece).”

 7 When they had come opposite Mysia, **they attempted** to go into Bithynia, but the **Spirit of Jesus did not allow them**; 8 so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

 9 During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 When he had **seen the vision**, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. 11 We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days.

This 3rd location is the charm, in fact this relationship became so strong we even have letters from Paul to the people of Philippi recorded in the Bible… that’s the letters to the Philippians!

This first visit could have gone better. Imagine that you are doing your best as a Christian. Imagine that you are sharing the teaching of Jesus as you go around town, and people are receptive to the gospel. Imagine that when you pray in the name of Jesus that people are healed in ways that they’d recognize; and people are coming to you for healings. Until you heal one too many people.

There is a young slave girl, who is sold out, thankfully not as thousands of girls are today… but rather this girl tells fortunes for people, who give a lot of money to the girl’s owners. This girl is so good as recognizing the truth that she shouts-out whenever Paul and Silas were near…. “ these men are slaves of the Most High God and proclaim a way to salvation.” At first glance, this is a win-win situation. Paul & Silas have a promoter, the people hear the unvarnished good news. But Paul does not like this ideal situation, in fact he is so annoyed by this young girl’s witness that after many days Paul finally snapped, and he turned and cast-out the spirit of divination!

We have no record of what the girl thought, nor what happened to her. But her owners were so angry about losing their money-making slave; that they dragged Paul and Silas to court (that was in the marketplace where the magistrate sat.) The crowd got in on the action attacking the 2 apostles, who were convicted, which included being stripped naked, beaten with rods, and given a severe flogging (a gruesome punishment that Jesus had undergone.) Just in case there was any fight left in Paul and Silas, they were thrown into the innermost cell of the prison AND had their feet fastened in stocks… which meant they’d have to rest their body weight on their deeply wounded backs.

Ok, maybe we don’t want to imagine being in that position. Maybe it’s enough to imagine being put in an unwanted situation. Or being forced into a position where there seemed to be no easy way out. Maybe you can imagine being stuck with nothing, nowhere to go, not enough money, not enough help. That’s being stuck, in the locked-stocks with Paul and Silas.

And listen to what **they** did in that painful time of imprisoned, wounded, waiting: they prayed and sang hymns to God. Maybe the hymns were the psalms, songs of lament… or maybe they were songs of victory for the captives. Whatever those hymns and prayers included… the other prisoners heard every note, every word of this witness in the darkness of **their** imprisonment. Well, maybe everyone except the jailer who had fallen asleep!

Then there was a violent earthquake! And all the doors were opened. And all the chains unlocked. And there was NO mass exodus once that freedom was granted! But there was new life. The jailer who was contemplating suicide rather than facing the public humiliation of completely failing at his job… was saved, physically first, then soon after he was spiritually saved through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In fact not just the jailer, but his entire household, wife, children, slaves… all heard the word of the Lord as Pail and Silas witnessed (notice that these two are still deeply wounded and bleeding) then their jailer took them into his own home and washed their wounds. (It almost sounds as though he did this personally, rather than having someone else do that menial task… especially a Gentile washing a Jew. And the entire household was baptized without delay! And then they ate!

Greyson is baptized into that same mystery. Because Jesus was arrested and flogged, and in his case died to release all of us from our imprisonments: to sin, hopelessness, and focus on scarcity. That amazing grace flings wide the doors for us, although we do not always go running out willingly into that new freedom. Today Nina, Christian, Nikki, Jonathan and all of us made promises to witness, to worship, to read the Bible together, to receive the sacraments of Communion and baptism, to learn and grow in our faith while serving God and neighbor. This is new life lived in the joy of the resurrection of our risen Lord.

Life as the sent ones is not always easy. Sometimes we want to go one way and the Spirit says no, go a different way. Sometimes our witnessing to the Good News through Jesus Christ gets us in places and positions that are uncomfortable. Sometimes there are even wounds encountered in our Christian walk together.

Baptism is not a cure-all. Baptism is an ‘include all.’ Baptism is a ‘do not lost hope y’all.’ Baptism is a ‘being filled with the Spirit so that when life has one locked-in-stocks, the heart can still sing and pray – call’… and God is still there present, listening, bringing others into this beautiful divine human relationship, sometimes through the wounded ones. Even in the darkest night, even in the most secure imprisonment the Light of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the unwavering abundant Life of the Creator is fully present and fully active, even in mysterious ways.

Greyson may you too be frequently surprised by the grace of God. May you always have a song in your heart and a prayer on your lips. Lord, may we all as your body in the world, have your songs and prayers stirring and carrying us wherever you take us.

Amen.