

The book is titled the Acts of the Apostles. We know about Pentecost when those who followed Jesus were sent out, new disciples of the good news.

And we all know Peter and Paul, among the more famous disciples. This sermon series is about the acts of some little-known disciples found in this book.

Today is the story of the Philippian Jailer. Paul and Silas are in jail for healing a slave girl who made a lot of money as a fortune teller for her owners, and they complained about losing their livelihood!

I wondered, though, and this is how this series took shape - why was this story about the Philippian jailer in here, why so much given to him?

Read - Acts 16:22-34

Was Paul thinking of the Philippian jailer when he wrote these words from prison to his friends in Philippi - “I thank my God every time I remember you...”

For what more of a joyful memory than the story of the Philippian jailer, a little-known disciple, and how he came to “share in the gospel...”

There was an earthquake - all the doors to the cells fall open! The prisoner’s chains are broken! When the dust settles, the jailer knows he’s in trouble.

Because if a prisoner escaped, one of two things could happen to the jailer - either the jailer serves out their sentence or he is executed for having let them escape.

So with those alternatives before him, this Philippian jailer draws his sword to take his own life.

Then, from the innermost cells, he hears voices: “Don’t do it! Don’t hurt yourself! We’re still here!”

Remember the lines in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians - how God has broken down the walls that divide us, the hostility between us.... it is grace that breaks down the walls.

Maybe Paul wrote that out of this experience - this earthquake is the grace of God that literally breaks down the walls between the Philippian jailer and Paul and Silas.

Here were these two prisoners at midnight, praying and singing hymns; two men who had been beaten, locked in the deepest and darkest of cells; in the face of their own misfortune, they were acting with joy!

There’s a powerful truth here: it is the witness of joy. Paul and Silas had a contagious cheerful spirit.

Look in the story again and note that phrase: “The other prisoners were listening...”

I wonder how many are turned away from faith because we are negative witnesses - grumbling, critical spirits.

If it brings us no joy, then why would anyone else want the faith we profess?

We all know people whose very presence brightens our day.

The question is: Are you that person for someone else? Is the sheer vitality of your witness for Christ inviting, joyful, encouraging?

On one hand, are you aware that we have unseen audiences observing, listening, learning from who we are, what we do, what we say.

But then, on the other hand, here we are today – listening in on this story of the joyful witness of Paul and Silas, and the story of this little-known disciple - the Philippian jailer.

He's afraid for his life - and he asks what he must do to be saved: Paul and Silas say, "Believe on Jesus Christ".

BELIEVE: the word means "trust, faith, have confidence in..." Believe is an action, a primary act of all these disciples.

The fact is that for most people, to say 'believe on Jesus Christ' largely means believing Jesus as a set of true-false statements, a creed, a doctrine.

And what we're seeing today is the rise of so many who simply say, "I just don't believe it anymore. It doesn't make sense to me anymore. I've lost faith in religion and the church. I can't pretend any longer. I've lost my faith in those beliefs. I'm not sure whether or not I believe in God."

Maybe you've heard the term given to these people, the 'nones': the ones who when asked about their religious affiliation on a census form answer with the word "none".

Today in Canada and the U.S., they make up more than 30 percent of the population.

Richard Rohr says that what happened over the years is that Christianity became more about "believing things to be true or false instead of giving people concrete practices so they could themselves know how to open up (faith), hold on (hope), and allow an infilling from another source (love)."

Paul's notion of believing is much better translated as one scholar notes, the "*foundational confidence or trust that God cares about what is happening right now.* (Richard Rohr)

That's the story Luke tells when the Philippian jailer asks, "what must I do to be saved."

"Right now! My life is in danger! What must I do to be saved?"

Paul doesn't hand him a pamphlet, doesn't give him a membership book to study – just simply says, "Believe on Jesus Christ."

He invites him to discipleship, not a doctrine; to a person, not a theological dissertation.

Later on in his letter to the Philippians, Paul says, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling..." In other words, live it.

And maybe when they heard that part of the letter read to them, those Philippian Christians looked over in the third pew by the window and saw the jailer and his family, living examples of doing salvation.

We don't know what happened to the Philippian jailer - what we have are just these few lines that tell his story - that show what he does after he hears that answer - "Believe on Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

The first thing we see is that he began to serve others.

Did you catch it in the story? The Philippian jailer "took [Paul and Silas] and washed their wounds."

The two always go together - believers always serve! Remember Jesus' words about caring for the least of these!

Paul and Silas had been beaten, whipped, "a severe flogging." The jailer took steps immediately to clean out their wounds. He began to serve immediately.

I agree with that old-time preacher Billy Sunday who said, "The church is not a dormitory for sleepers, it is an institution for workers; it is not a rest camp, it is a front-line trench."

You're in the church, a disciple of Jesus Christ, you go to work!

There are things we have to be doing together, and when you're in this church, you're expected to serve. Everyone has some place to serve.

And then he shares.

Our lesson says he brought Paul and Silas "up into the house and set food before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced..."

Chuck Swindoll describes this kind of life as "becoming a model of joyful generosity."

This is the trumpet call to extravagant love - to open yourself to be used by God; to give of yourself to someone's need; to receive from others the love of God you need.

Faith is for sharing. Faith is deepened in the midst of fellowship. Sharing is how we strengthen one another.

The Philippian jailer and his family, Paul and Silas, all of them rejoiced as they shared with one another in this newfound faith, the love of God in Jesus Christ.

A little-known disciple - but a grand story of faith and hope and love, doing salvation: he serves others, he shares with others.

On the face of it - Paul and Silas were the prisoners - doing time; but in the faith of it, the jailer is the one who gains freedom - doing salvation.

There's a scene in Colson Whitehead's wonderful story The Underground Railroad in which Cora, a runaway slave and the main character, is in Indiana on the Valentine Farm, a haven for free slaves.

Cora is being taught the Declaration of Independence by Georgina, and she doesn't understand all the big words and feels embarrassed, asking if all the younger children understood all of them.

Georgina says the children make of it what they can, and then says, "*The Declaration is like a*

map. You trust that it's right, but you only know by going out and testing it yourself.

That's why I think Luke makes sure this story of the Philippian Jailer is in the Acts of the Apostles - that in this act of this little-known disciple, we see the story Luke told in his gospel of how you have to go and do salvation.

Remember it - when Jesus was asked about what you have to do to receive eternal life, that is, salvation, Jesus said, "Love God, love one another; life right now.

And then he told the story of the Good Samaritan - and do you see the pattern - the Good Samaritan served and he shared.

And at the end of that story, Jesus said, "Go and do it." Salvation is doing life right now in the name of Jesus Christ.

"You trust that it's right, but you only know by going out and testing it yourself."

Like the Philippian Jailer, we, too, have our questions about our lives right now; fearful times and the dangers we feel and what do we have to do to be saved from the evils we face.

The good news is that we, too, hear the invitation to enter the story of the Acts of the Apostles.

Like I said before: Not the Systematic Theology of the Apostles, not the Book of Order of the Apostles, not the Policy Manual of the Apostles, not the "This is how we've always done it" Apostles.

No, simply "The Acts of the Apostles": spirit born, spirit driven, spirit led, going, doing, talking, showing, teaching, healing, helping, praying, sharing.

Just like Jesus said centuries ago at the end of his story: go and do it - just like the Philippian jailer - doing salvation!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.