

## 5-8-16 Sermon Acts 14

Just a heads up – I know we could be focusing on the Ascension since it is the Sunday before Pentecost yet our scripture today comes from the book of Acts and is not so well known. I also am very aware of the importance of Pentecost to this church which takes me back a couple of years when we spent so much fruitful time with our Core Values – but like the Ascension that is a conversation for another time. Right now I want to invite you to leave both the expected and the familiar behind as we join Paul and Silas on a most excellent adventure . . .

To say Paul had an exciting time in Philippi would be a huge understatement and this is just the beginning. This is a very long scripture reading but it can be boiled down some. Paul and his partner Silas were headed for prayer meeting when a young woman with a questionable gift started following them around announcing to the world, “*These people are servants of the Most High God!*” Now she didn’t just do this on the way to prayer meeting that one day she actually followed them for days making the same irritating proclamation! Paul’s patience finally wears out and casts the spirit out of her that allowed her to see what others could not.

The collateral affect was financial – imagine that, money somehow plays into this. Seems this young woman made a lot of money for her owners with her gift and Paul ruined it for them so someone has to pay the price. Paul and Silas are hauled before the authorities where they are stripped – beaten and thrown in jail **for?** “**promoting customs that we Romans can’t accept or practice.**” They were placed in

maximum security with their feet in **stocks**? and with a personal guard.

Kind of strange now that I think about it – there is no mention of the young woman at the arraignment or in prison– **why do you think that is?** She is now of no value – she is nothing. She disappears. One can only hope her new found freedom lead her to find her place in following Jesus with a new and very different life!

It is midnight when Paul and Silas break out in prayers and are singing up a storm to God – loud enough for everyone to hear – when there was an earthquake – not a did you feel something earthquake but a 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Since the prison was not built to 2016 earthquake standard all the doors opened and the anchors for the chains came out of the walls and everyone was free to go. Needless to say the guard was awakened and was ready to commit hari-kari.

But that doesn't happen friends. **Why?** Because no one left – everyone stayed in their cells. Lantern's are brought in – the jailer discovers the miracle and falls at Paul and Silas' feet. In the end not only is the jailer saved from killing himself, he is saved for Jesus along with his entire household and baptized and his life will never be the same.

I know I took a lot of time retelling the story – hopefully with cause. One it is not as familiar as many and secondly it is profound.

Paul and Silas and the young woman had something in common – **what was it?** The answer is in the first two verses of the reading. They were all slaves or servants really no difference – she to her owners and Paul and Silas to God. Strange common

ground. When Paul casts out the spirit that lived in her it sounds like he did it out of irritation and annoyance, but I want to also believe he also had compassion for her and that also motivated the mini-exorcism. They paid a terrible price for what they did and I want to believe they did it because they thought she was worth saving from the spirit and life it forced her to live – that they put a higher value on her than anyone else did.

**What was Paul thinking when he hung around in a prison that suddenly had no doors and no chains to keep him in?** And I imagine it was by his and Silas' example the rest of the prisoners stayed put – **why in the world would he have done that?** Clearly, if Paul and the rest hadn't stayed put their jailer would have killed himself. Think that was reason enough for Paul to stay. He placed a value equal to his own on the jailer and for that reason the jailer's life was not only literally saved, but he along with his whole family was saved – saved from life without God.

Like it or not we as individuals and as a society, place a value on people or groups of people all of the time. **Don't we?** We might say we don't, but we do. And more often than not the value we place on people is done in dollars!

**Do we spend the same amount of money educating the children in our country or does it vary by zip code?**

**When we compensate people for the work they do aren't we really measuring their value? Home health aides vs. say athletes? School teachers vs. entertainers?** I could go on, but there is really no need.

We even place a value on ourselves not that we say it that way – we derive our

sense of worth from our job or the size of our house or the car we drive or the brand of clothes we wear or the school we attended – and it extends to how we look at others. Those same elements and more are how we value ourselves and others.

Yet Paul and Silas have declared this to be **DSW Sunday**. **You are familiar with DSW Sunday aren't you? Divine – Sacred – Worth Sunday**. A standing invitation for us to look at and to see ourselves and others as God does. Our God values and finds worthy all of his children. There is another place in this Gospel where it says something like, “*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life.*” More familiar that Paul and Silas's story, but tied together just the same.

Lord help us to see ourselves and others as You do . . . Amen .