

## Sermon 2'6'19 Acts 16: 16-34; John 17: 20-26

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*May I speak in the name of the one true God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen †*

### Intro

Have you ever been up the Spinnaker Tower in Portsmouth? The *views* are astonishing, from 500' up you can see almost 25 miles. Suddenly everything falls into *place* - you see how familiar landmarks stand in relation to each other.

There's something else: A solid glass floor you can walk across, and through which you see Gunwharf Quays far below. But what I hadn't expected was how *unnerving* that absence of solid ground would be! It must feel a bit like that in an *earthquake*, when the *solid* ground starts *moving*.

In our reading from Acts, Paul and Silas experience an earthquake whilst in gaol in northern Greece.

### Part 2

There was no synagogue in Philippi, just a spot where the few Jews in that city gathered to worship down by the river. Paul and Silas started joining them. And, by preaching the good news of Jesus, they made converts.

But a Roman slave girl began following them, a *psychic* whose fortune-telling made lots of money for her owners. She annoyed Paul by shouting "*these are slaves of the most high God!*". Assuming that a spirit possessed her, Paul ordered it out in Jesus' name. And suddenly, she *lost* her money-making talent. Her angry owners complained to the magistrates, "*these men are disturbing our city, they're encouraging customs that aren't lawful for us Romans*". Beaten and thrown into gaol, Paul and Silas occupy themselves by praying and singing hymns to God.

That area's prone to *earthquakes*, and suddenly, during the night, the prison is shaken so violently that its doors are broken. Assuming his prisoners have scarpered, their gaoler, terrified he'll be horribly punished, prepares to *kill* himself. But they call "*don't harm yourself, we're still here!*".

Imagine his amazement (and relief). *Normal* criminals would have seized their chance and given little thought to their captor. But, incredibly, *these* men *haven't* - instead, they've just saved their gaoler's *life*. Trembling, he's moved to *ask* about their strange *faith*. They tell him, '*believe in the Lord Jesus, and you'll be saved*'.

Two things to note: Firstly, believing *IN someone* means putting your *trust* in them. Secondly, at that time being '*saved*' *didn't* mean 'going to heaven (rather than hell) when you die', as it came to mean in mediaeval Europe. Jesus often speaks of someone being '*saved*' when he means *freed*

from some condition that causes *distress* and *prevents* them *participating* in the life of their community. Being 'saved', then, means '*living as you were meant to live*'.

Paul and Silas take the *opportunity* to *explain* to their gaoler, and his family, about *JESUS*. After this, he takes them into his house, cleans their wounds, and feeds them. And the whole of that pagan household *puts their trust in God*.

### Part 3

Paul and Silas' Christian *faith* brings them into conflict with their *world*.

- Do we, as followers of Jesus, ever find ourselves in conflict with the ways of our *world* – 'going against the grain'? .... If not, *SHOULDN'T* we?
- Do *we* advocate different customs (being in church instead of having a lie-in, or maybe refusing to *buy* certain things because of the conditions under which they're produced.....)?
- Do we have different *values* - regarding human *relationships*, or the *plight* of those less fortunate than us?

We can *see* the *mess* the world is in - violent conflict, greed, exploitation, corrupting of human relationships. A recent UN report showed how life in the UK has become *less secure* for many people during the past 20 years – it caused outrage, but speak to people outside '*comfortable*' Britain, and it's clear there's something *in* it.

From a *Christian* perspective, this is how '*the world is*' – as opposed to how it would be if *JESUS* were *reigning as Lord*.

Of course, Jesus *IS* Lord, but his *reign* must *spread* through people *acknowledging* this.

Surely, as Christians, we're *not supposed* to feel at *ease* with the world *as it is* - notwithstanding the fact that there's *much* that's *good* in the world (for which we should give thanks)?

Do we keep *quiet* about our *faith*? - how would those around us *tell* that we're followers of Jesus?

Far from hiding *their* faith, Paul and Silas let it be *known*, even in the face of suffering – and so, a man's *life* was saved, and his whole family came to *faith* in Jesus.

As the saying goes, 'big trees from little acorns grow'. We never know how God may *use* us. But we can't do it all by *ourselves*. However, when people pray, God does new *things* (often by changing how somebody *sees* the world).

### Part 4

In our reading from John, Jesus *prays* (after the Last Supper, before leading his disciples through the darkness to the Garden of Gethsemane - where he'll be arrested, while they run away terrified).

He's praying for his *disciples* - BUT he *also* says '*I'm praying, too, for the people who'll COME to believe in me because of their word*'. That means *US*.

After Jesus' death, once they'd encountered the *risen* Lord, his *followers didn't* keep their experience, or their faith, to *themselves* – they *shared* it with *anybody* who'd listen.

Unless they'd *done* so, *we* wouldn't be here this morning. Quite a thought! - Perhaps it should make each of *us* consider ways in which *we* might *share* our faith.

### Part 5

So, what *is* Jesus *asking* God, as he thinks about all his followers down the centuries to our own time?

- That they (and WE) may all be *one* .... 'I in *them* and you in *me*, Father .... So the *world* may know that YOU have *sent* ME, and you have *LOVED* *them* just as you have loved *me*.'

- 'The *world* doesn't know you, Father, BUT I know you, and my followers know you've *sent* me'. 'I've made your name *known* to them (and I *will* make it known), so that the LOVE with which *you* have loved *me* may be *in them*, and that I may be in them'.

This means that we Christians should be *united* – not indifferent to one another, not set against each other, but united *across* all the *barriers* of custom, background, nationality, race, gender, sexuality. As Jesus said during that final meal, "*this is how all people will know that you are MY followers, if you have LOVE for one another*".

### Part 6

There's something *else* that Jesus asks his Father – "*I want those you've given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory - the glory which you have given me because you loved me*".

Strange words!

The first thing that comes to mind is that Jesus is referring to those faithful *companions* who've been with him (and have come to '*believe in*' him) during the three years of his ministry.

But what does he mean by '*seeing his glory*'?

- He wants his beloved friends to *SEE* the agonising *REALITY* of his *death* –

- And THEN to *witness* for themselves the *astonishing truth* of his *RESURRECTION* – not as some ghostly apparition, but as a substantial *BODY* that can be *touched* and consume *food* – but which can also appear in closed rooms, and disappear again.

- He wants them to bear *witness* to the fact that he has *POWER* over *DEATH* itself; to bear witness to the *truth* of his *humanity* (as if *that* were ever in doubt), and above all to the *truth* of his *DIVINITY* - to the truth of GOD'S power, to the truth that *this* is what the *Scriptures* have been leading up to, and to the truth of God's *LOVE* for the world reflected *through him* - in fact to the truth of *everything* Jesus has been trying to help them *understand* during their time together.

### Part 7

But what about US? Must *we wait* until the *next life* to see his glory? No, it's *all around us* if only we have eyes to *see* it. God doesn't remain aloof – he *showed* this by *sharing* our humanity (and our capacity for suffering) in Jesus.

God is *present in us*, his *love* is present within us - if only we can *recognise* this. And each of us, with the *help* of the *Holy Spirit* (which Jesus promised to send to his followers), can act as a '*lens*' or a '*prism*' through which his glory, and his love, becomes *visible* in people's *lives*.

We can *see instances* of God's love being reflected into *this* community – through the Beacon Food Bank, through the groups that are able to flourish in our church's Pallant Centre - Mums and toddlers, musicians, young actors, people with problems of addiction, hard-pressed families of service personnel, people who find bargains in our church shop, people who find fellowship there. We don't have to '*beat people over the head with a Bible*' to show God's love, and to play some part in *building* God's kingdom.

God has *begun* to put the world right, in Jesus. And he *will* put the world *fully* right in the end. In the mean-time he puts *people* right, so that they (*we*) can be *part* of his 'putting-right' project for the world.

Let each of us pray that *we* may play *our* part, however modest. It's better to light one candle than to curse the dark!

*Amen †*