

Easter 7C / Assension
Act: 16:16-34
Pastor Tim Koester

being saved from whatever we need saving from

I once asked a young person who was struggling to understand some difficult scripture passages if she thought the bible was more like a “rulebook” that simply provided do’s and don’t to live by (along with the appropriate punishments and rewards) or if the bible was more like a “novel”, where drama, surprise and unusual characters come together and tell a story we still relate to thousands of years later. We agreed that even though parts of the bible contain rules and regulations, those “legal” aspects are really part of a much larger story...

– the story of God’s on-going salvation

which is the story of God’s on-going creation,

because being saved from whatever we need saving from
is a gift given on faith in the crucified and risen one.

The story that we have in the second reading today, is part of Luke’s longer story of the early church. The author of the *Gospel of Luke* is also the author of the *Acts of the Apostles* and he is one of the best storytellers in the New Testament. Last week, we heard of Paul’s chance encounter with a well-to-do woman named Lydia at a place in town where people met to pray. She listened to him tell the story of Jesus and that story of good news was the saving grace that led her, and her entire household, to be washed in the waters of baptism and given a new lease on life. We are not told what happens to her after that. We simply know that a wealthy and powerful woman needed saving from something and she found that salvation in the story of Jesus Christ.

Immediately after the encounter with Lydia, Luke goes on to tell of another encounter, with another woman, in this same place of prayer. This time however, the circumstances, and the people, couldn’t be more different. This time Paul and his companions are followed for several days by a woman every bit Lydia’s opposite. She is a slave, without any real power, and valuable only because of what she can do. She has the perceived ability to speak about the future, which was a valuable asset in ancient Greece. People, including kings and emperors, would come from all over the countryside to hear oracles from the priestess at the city of Delphi and this slave girl is said to have the same type of “spirit” – the same breath, although perhaps with a kind of “off-Broadway” quality.

Still she spoke the truth when she said Paul and his companions were servants of “the most high God”, a typical way of speaking about the God worshiped by the people of Israel. But Paul became disturbed by her pronouncements. We aren’t really told why but one day out of the blue, Paul simply turns to the girl and commands the “spirit” to come out of her. Within a short amount of time, her owners realize that she has lost her ability to generate cash flow and that’s when the trouble begins for Paul and his companions. They are accused of “disturbing the peace”, beaten, and thrown in prison.

Consider for a moment **who** needs to be “saved” in this story and from **what** do they need to be saved from? **What kind of salvation, what kind of deliverance, does believing in Jesus offer** and does any of it **apply** to **our** lives today?

We talked a little about this in our class on communion last week. We say that in this meal of bread and wine, [God offers forgiveness of sins, life and salvation](#). But what do these words mean for us, particularly that big word "salvation". I think a lot of the time we associate that word with eternal salvation. Many of our more fundamental brothers and sisters would say that "getting saved" is about avoiding hell and going to heaven because we have made a decision to have a "personal relationship with Jesus Christ".

But the text we have this morning from Acts speaks about salvation in much different terms. There are all kinds of things right here in this life that enslave, imprison, and threaten us. When the prison guard asks, "What must I do to be saved?" I don't think he was considering his eternal destiny. He was much more concerned with how his bosses were going to react to his job performance. The prison guard is under tremendous pressure from the responsibilities of his job. [Failure is simply not an option](#) for him. Don't many of us feel the same at times? Isn't it ironic that the prisoners end up freeing the prison guard? Does that happen for us?

Another location for salvation might be the owners of the slave girl. They were consumed with economics. They didn't really care if Paul and his friends were "disturbing the peace". They cared that they were losing money but are we any different today? Money still talks and money still causes divisions among us. Money still 'consumes' and 'enslaves' countless people. Does Jesus offer anything to [free us from greed](#) and save us from selfishness?

And while we are talking about the slave girl, let's consider the institution of slavery itself. We like to think that such a thing was outlawed in this country long ago but the practice continues in many ways. There are many human beings trafficked around the world and their sole function is to service the needs of their owners. They certainly need to be saved from that kind of oppression but we also need to be [saved](#) from [our indifference](#) to this injustice.

But one of the most remarkable things in this story of salvation is how the shouts of a slave girl ultimately bring salvation to the household of prison guard with every life touched along the way, somehow changed. There isn't a neat little formula for how God acts in our lives. The good news of God's love for us in Jesus Christ meets us right in the middle of some of the darkest prisons we find ourselves in. God is never far away, even when earthquakes rattle the ground or our lives are completely shaken up.

[Being saved from whatever it is that we need saving from happens through faith](#). Faith that depends not on us but upon the saving and creating power of God who works in any and every circumstance. Faith frees us to act knowing that God is with us no matter what and the crazy twists and turns of life are not set backs but rather opportunities to infect more and more lives with the peace, and hope and love that comes only from God. Let us go out today, [knowing](#) that God [has saved](#) us, [continues to save](#) us, and [promises to always save](#) us from every force that threatens us. It may look completely different from our idea of salvation but that is just another way we are being saved from our own desire to write the story for ourselves. Whatever your story is this morning, I pray that you will continue through it on faith that God is always with you no matter what.