

Sermon – *In the Footsteps of the Apostles – Paul, Silas and the Jailer*

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Athelstone Uniting Church #67

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Text: Acts 16:16-34 – Message Bible

Let's pray...

Risen Lord Jesus

Draw near.. as we lean into you..

Open our eyes to see

Open our ears to hear

your Word to us this morning. Amen.

Shoes

We are now in the season after Easter, and the resurrection of Jesus, following in the footsteps of his apostles and their travels.

Each week we are looking closely into the story of one or two of the apostles. The shoes indicate the footsteps.

Exciting story!

Today we heard the exciting story of Paul and Silas.

It is set in the Roman colony of Philippi in Macedonia. We heard last week about how they had been going to the place of prayer by the river, and had met Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth.

This reading continues on from there.

It begins with their encounters with a slave girl who was drawing attention to them by calling out – and how Paul, fed up with her behaviour, turned and commanded the spirit in her to go – which it did.

That got her owners upset as they had lost their means to making money, so they roughly grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the Roman authorities accusing them of being trouble makers.

They were arrested and the mob got angry. They were treated terribly and then thrown into jail.

In the middle of the night Paul and Silas were praying in their cell and loudly singing their praises to God, when there was a sudden earthquake – the jailhouse was shaken, the cell doors flew open and the prisoners chains came loose.

The poor jailer woke up, saw what had happened and thought he was going to be a goner – he had failed his job of keeping the prisoners locked up. In his despair, he was about to do himself harm when Paul intervened – Don't do that! We're all still here! Nobody has run away!

The jailer called for light, saw that they were still there, fell before Paul and Silas and asked:

"Sirs' what do I have to do to be saved, to really live?"

Or, as Tom Wright translates it:

Please tell me how I can get out of this mess?¹

And their reply:

Put your entire trust in the Master Jesus - then you'll live as you were meant to live – and everyone in your house included!

Then, with a quick scene change, we hear how Paul and Silas shared the Good News with them – and how the whole family listened in and got involved. They stayed up talking all night. The jailer tended to their wounds and in the middle of the night, they baptised the jailer and everyone in the household.

Then everyone celebrated around a meal – everyone in the house was in on the celebration!

¹ Tom Wright: Acts for Everyone part 2, page 67

There is so much in this story to unpack!

This story has many **people** in it:

There are the apostles: Paul and Silas

The slave girl and her owners

The mob

The police and the judges

The jailkeeper

The jailkeeper's family and everyone in his house

We tend to focus on Paul and Silas and the amazing ministry they had as apostles: spiritual healing, oppression, imprisonment, public praise and worship, sharing the Good News and baptising new believers.

This is part of the ministry of **apostles**:

Disciples of Jesus who had been sent on a mission. Messengers, envoys, preachers of the Good News, typically those with a passion and drive for evangelism and being the catalysts for change.

Apostles are still around today, those who have the gift of evangelism, who boldly go into places, where they may not always be welcome, to herald the good news, often creating a stir, then moving on to the next place and the next.

Meanwhile there is a trail of people left behind who have been changed, who have been set free

What happens to them?

What happened to the slave girl?

What happened to her owners?

What about the jailkeeper and his whole family?

What happened next?

I believe this is where **discipleship** steps in...

where households of people On the Way were springing up around the place with believers working out how to do life differently, following Jesus' teaching, encouraging one another, praying for one another and celebrating together.

Paul and the others would write letters back to them to encourage them, but largely left them to work through their own change management in their own contexts. That takes a different set of gifts!

Centuries later, we have the benefit of the collection of these letters – gathered together in the Bible – as well as the traditions of the church- that grew out of these households – and the gift of the Holy Spirit – to teach and equip and encourage us in our own journeys of discipleship.

God still calls apostles **today** – traveling evangelists, change agents, gospel preachers, and so on who sometimes bring about revivals - in individuals and communities – then move onto the next event or the place where they are called. Perhaps there are some apostles among us today!

God also calls us as disciples to be attentive to God's Word as it is proclaimed, to be witnesses as we live out our faith, to adjust and change as the Word is proclaimed in new ways, to walk alongside each other in the highs and lows of life, and to serve the world with love.

Over the centuries, discipleship and in particular, faith formation has developed and has not always been successful. We have seen a decline in numbers of people attending church in our Western society.

Foundational principles of discipleship

A few years ago, I heard about a collaboration called Here2stay². The Bible Society, Compassion, Focus on the Family, Scripture Union and Willow Creek came together to ask:

Why are so many young people leaving the church? What can we do to reverse this trend and see young people grow as long term, active followers of Jesus?

They engaged in a 3 year conversation with representatives from major Christian organisations and denominations, along with an exploration of reports, research and literature from across the Western world, which revealed some of the missing elements in this process of making disciples.

They came up with ten things that work together to provide local churches with some focussed direction to help people grow as disciples.:

The first two foundational principles are:

1. Family or household nurture and
2. Generational Connections.

They discovered that young people who grow in faith as adults, were once teenagers who had come from families, where Christian growth was modelled in at least one of their parents and

They had developed significant connections with an extended family of adults within the church.

Family / household nurture

Faith formation begins in the home... this includes all those who live under the one roof. And it also includes the handing on of faith from one generation to the next in the family.

² <http://here2stay.org.au/>

This takes us back to what was happening back in Paul's times -

we heard how the jailer's whole family got in on hearing the good news and being baptised. Then celebrating together.

Formational pillars

As well as those foundational principles, here2stay talk about 8 formational pillars:

1. Serving together in mission,
2. Understanding the big story of the Bible, and where we fit into that big story,
3. Being intentional about providing spaces for encounters with Jesus,
4. Modelling the compassion of Jesus in response to the needs of the world around us
5. Being part of a positive peer community,
6. Providing peak experiences, places where God meets us, stretches and inspires us, and transformation happens
7. Having mentors and life coaches, in our lives who take time to listen, to encourage, to be available, and to be accepting
8. And providing anchors or rites of passage to anticipate, honour and celebrate

And again, that is what happened – the jailer's family were baptised – an anchor in their faith formation – and then marked the moment with a celebration – a time they would be able to look back on and remember as a highlight of their faith journey.

Soon, we will be living out a rite of passage for Imogen then celebrating together with a cuppa and morning tea.

I want to encourage all parents and grandparents to reflect on how you model your Christian faith for your family.

As a congregation, let's be intentional about ways to help Imogen and other young people to grow in their faith. For example:

Let's work together across the generations in

1. Serving together in mission,

2. In Being intentional about providing spaces for encounters with Jesus, talking openly about our faith, and stopping to pray for each other
3. In Modelling the compassion of Jesus in response to the needs of the world around us and involving young people in both the decision making as well as the actions as we respond
4. In Providing peak experiences, places where God meets us, stretches and inspires us, and transformation happens – experiences like camps and conferences and concerts and retreats
5. Making ourselves available as mentors and life coaches, who take time to listen, to encourage, to be available, and to be accepting of the young people in our lives
6. And providing rites of passage to anticipate, honour and celebrate as we move through different stages in our faith and in our life.

I could spend a good 5 minutes or more on each one of the here2stay principles and pillars – but I'll leave that for another day!

If you would like to know more in the meanwhile, google [here](#) two (number 2) stay and you'll find lots of information about ways to help young people grow as life long disciples of Jesus.

Friends, as disciples of Jesus, we all have so much to be thankful for.

Let's give thanks for the pioneering work of those early apostles who showed a new way of living life by following the teaching of Jesus.

Putting *our* trust in Jesus means we get to live the joyful life as we were meant to live!