**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**4th July 2021**

**Acts 16:16-32**

**Please note, after this week, the podcast will take a wee pause one the rest of July and return on 8th August. However, by going to the church website ([nkchurch.org.uk](http://nkchurch.org.uk)) you can listen again to all the podcasts since March last year, or tune into Cairn’s Milngavie who are posting podcasts each Sunday at Cairns church.org.uk. The phone line service will offer a past service from last year - hopefully no one will remember that far back!**

**Welcome**

Hello. How are you doing? Suddenly it feels there is a different pace to things. Summer holidays have arrived and the pattern of our days has changed.

We meet a story today in Acts, where the pattern of Paul and Silas’ day is somewhat interrupted. In fact it has been going this way for some time. They are still in Philippi, the city where they met Lydia the woman of the purple cloth, first convert in Europe.

It is quite a melting pot, Philippi. Quite a crossroads of the world, cusp of Europe in one direction and cusp of middle east in another. Ancient cultures come together and mingle and in the midst of all of this is Paul, attempting to drum up support, or evangelise, for this movement called The Way.

It is, perhaps, the place we are constantly invited to attend, with Good news, not so much to proselytise, but to engage, discuss, share, live out our faith, a place where all the world meets and love can be found.

**Prayer**

Loving God

In the very thinness of this place

Where earth and heaven move alongside each other

May we find our place

Beside love

And grace

And renewal

May we find such a place

Holds us and loves us all

And invites us into becoming

The people you will for us to be

Renewed each day

Set free every morning

May we take the bundle of worries we are

The hurts

The prejudices

And in your presence now

Name them

Call them out

Claim them to be ours

And in that honesty and hope

Hand them over to you

To redeem

(Pause)

Loving God

May you claim us

Hold us close

Renew us with your promise

That we are loved

Redeemed

Renewed

And set free in your name

To be who we are

And even as the world turns against us

Or sets up barriers of fear and prejudice

In you

We are all loved

Shaped by you

From the very beginning

To be this way

Hear us

As together we say

The global prayer

Our Father, who is in heaven,

Hallowed be your name;

Your kingdom come;

Your will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,

for ever.

Amen

**Story Introduction**

Today we weave our thoughts through the story, taking each bit piece by piece and challenging it as it challenges us. It is a gospel story, so it is alive in this way, inviting us to step into it, look around it and find that it say to us, and about us. We’re in Philippi, on the Greek mainland. We’ve already met Lydia and Cornelius. Paul and Silas are on their way to their usual meeting place where the met Lydia when a strange things happens to them… again. In fact it is constantly happening which has become quite annoying and is where this story starts.

**Story**

**One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.**

A healing! A slave-girl is possessed and Paul cures her. But, its not done because Paul feels pity for her, or that she particularly wants healed. Paul is annoyed, and to get rid of her, he heals her.

It’s not where you’d normally start with healing: she’s annoying me so I’ll sort her out and heal her, take away her ‘gift’.

This abuse comes from the culture of the time: Paul is trying to make a mark in his preaching. This is Philippi, an important place. This slave girl is, well, a slave and female and young, so whatever comes out of her mouth, few will believe as these are three classic categories for being an untrustworthy witness. So if she is following Paul around, proclaiming he was a prophet, it was actually undermining him. The solution: cure.

Yet, this is the same town as Lydia, but she’s a business woman, she is wealthy, Paul doesn’t complain there. It seems, he disregards this girl because of her status, and that is hard to hear. Lesson number one.

But, worse, what will happen to the girl now? She’s a victim of trafficking and now she has no ability to earn an income, what do her traffickers do with her now? We are not told, but Paul, who placed is own success above the needs of the slave girl doesn’t come out of this well.

But do you do? It is just so difficult to balance the ethics of the gospel, thinking you are doing the right thing, alongside the actual reality of folk’s lives. We stop buying one kind of product because of unethical standards and send those who produce it into unemployment. Ethics is difficult. Faith is the art of the balance between the high morals and the reality of life, finding an honest, loving way through. That takes conversation and discussion and relationship building. Lesson two: it’s all about relationships.

But the story isn’t over.

**When her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.**

The slave-girl’s owners obviously want something done, their livelihoods have just been ruined. But, that is not what they complain about. In fact that isn’t mentioned. Their complaint is that Paul and Silas have been ‘disturbing the city’ because they are Jews. Wow!

This is an ethnically motivated complaint. The slave girl isn’t mentioned again and Paul and Silas are flogged not because they violated the rights of a trafficked slave girl (not that she had any rights being a slave, young and female), nor because they ruined the livelihood of the girls owners, though they could have complained about that, but they didn’t use that. They were flogged because they were Jews.

A marginalised group being targeted by the majority, beaten and jailed, not because of what they did, but because of who they were. Lesson three. And the story continues.

**About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.**

Now this is all a bit peculiar as a literal event. Maybe it happened exactly like this, perhaps it didn’t, but the point of telling the story is to stop the downward spiral where hate just begets more hate. Everything up to this point is hate upon hate, prejudice upon prejudice. Here the jailer, the bouncer for the enemy, and Paul could have taken the story down further, the jailer was ready to fall on his sword, Paul could have escaped, one upmanship, you get us, we get you back, but it doesn’t happen that way. Paul and Silas stayed, the jailer is surprised, perhaps Paul and Silas are too, but, the chain is broken. The cycle of retribution stops here.

Now, of all the things this story may have been about as it grew in the telling, and the insights it brings us about our world today that makes us stop and consider how we relate to each other in our world, this is the lesson: if our humanity and love are to be preserved in this day and age, when social media is all about retribution and hate storms, governments go for populism before ethical integrity, and we look for scapegoats that deflect everything away from ourselves, the message of Acts is one that calls for us TO STOP the cycle of hate and hurt.

When the foundations of our communities and society, perhaps literally in Pauls case, are shaken, the gospel of Acts calls us to stand firm, stop the cycle and adopt the ways that speak of love. And is there ever any other lesson we need to learn?

**News**

Thank you, as always for your company on these podcasts each week. We’re going to pause them for a month over July and invite you to revisit some past editions of the podcast at nkchurch.org.uk/podcast. Or visit cairnschurch.org.uk where they offer a weekly podcast too.

However, while some of our activities are slowing down for the summer, not everything is doing so. Our Dear Friend project, or writing a few postcards to folk who have been a bit isolated over lockdown and pandemics is ongoing. We have a few hundred still to do so if you feel able, it is a postcard that begins ‘Dear Friend’ and then some news about the weather, the garden, you pet, a whole bundle of upbeat things that might help keep us cheery. Send these to the church and we will deliver to over 550 folk.

Have a good summer and we’ll see you back here in August but as we draw all these thoughts together, we also draw the needs of the world here and Wilma will lead us in our prayer for others, Wilma.

**Prayers for Others**

God of dreams and lord of visions, We pray for eyes to see and ears to hear, For hearts and minds that will respond with love, To the plight of those caught up in a cycle of poverty.

In places of famine and desert, We pray for life giving water to quench their thirst, And the water of life to satisfy their thirsty souls, Lord hear their cry

We pray too for out world torn apart by conflict and war, and for all who are bound fast in a climate of fear with no clear vision for the future.

Wise councillor and faithful friend, draw alongside those today who seek to escape because the ‘now’ holds too little hope for them to feel safe. They dream of a better life in another place but risk being trapped, tricked and traded by empty promises and manipulative lies. Lord, give them wisdom, shield them from harm.

Almighty and most loving God, we pray for the helpless victims of human trafficking, used and abused by their captors then cruelly abandoned when their usefulness is over.

In this dark and lonely place may the light of your presence break into the prison of their damaged lives and let them know that they are precious in your sight.

God of love, bless all those in our land who are without shelter this day. Give us grace to see Jesus in the face of every homeless person we meet. We pray for help to become a more compassionate and understanding society that works to give the destitute hope for a brighter future.

Great Physician, we remember family and friends confined in an inner call of illness, pain and grief. In the silence of our hearts we name them before you —

Give them courage and healing of body and soul and surround them with the comfort of the everlasting arms.

Heavenly Father, who sees the unseen and notices the unnoticed, we thank you that you are a God who loosens the shackles and sets the captive free. Your son came to give good news to the poor and freedom to the oppressed, may we, too, hear the hidden voices, dare to stand up beside you, call out injustice and become channels of your peace.

All this we pray to you, O God, to whom no one is invisible, unheard, of unloved. Amen

**Benediction**

Go now

Into the freedom that is ours

And share that with others

And the grace…