

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Sermon: "When the Light Breaks In"

Scripture: Acts 16:16-34

Rev. Steve Filyk

April 26, 2026

Opener: Now let the vault of heaven resound 255

Choruses: Living Hope & This is Amazing Grace (both Wickham)

Communion Hymn: Behold the Lamb (Communion Hymn)

Closer: The strife is o'er, the battle done 257

Lift up your hand if you have heard any of these sayings.

Keep it up and we will see how many hands are raised.

"Smooth seas never made a skilled sailor."

"Nothing worth having comes easy."

"You reap what you sow."

"No pain, no gain."

"What doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

Most of us expect life to include hardship.

We know it takes effort to reach our goals  
in school, at work, in our families.

Many of us lean on our faith  
to help us pursue those goals.

But what if following Jesus invites us  
to pursue something different—something bigger?

And what if pursuing that  
actually leads us into more trouble?

Would we still follow?

Because the truth is

God often uses suffering to bring others to faith.

That's exactly what we see in Acts 16.

As you may remember,

Saul once believed that followers of Jesus

were corrupting the faith—and he set out to stop them.

But an encounter with the risen Christ turned his life upside down.

The persecutor became a preacher.

And as his mission moved to the Gentile world,

Saul—also called Paul—began using his Roman name.

In today's lesson we meet Paul on his second missionary trip.

He had set out to revisit the towns

where he had previously preached.. [see Acts 15:36ff]

Under the direction of the Holy Spirit,

this trip expanded through Macedonia

And today Paul is in the Roman colony of Philippi

In what is now the north-east part of modern-day Greece.

You've heard the story.

Paul frees a slave girl from a spirit

costing her owners their income.

In retaliation, Paul and Silas are beaten and thrown into prison.

Then, in the night, an earthquake shakes the jail...

chains fall off... doors fly open...

and a jailer's life is changed forever.

What wasn't included in our lesson

is that the next day, when Paul & Silas are officially released,

Paul drops the bombshell that he is a Roman citizen,

Making all of this harsh treatment illegal.

This alarms the magistrates

Who then provide Paul & Silas with an official escort

And beg them to leave the city.

So what are we to learn from this story?

There are at least three keys lessons here.

First of all it should be noted  
That the Gospel is disruptive.

The financial and political order of Philippi  
Allowed for people to be exploited  
And for justice to be thwarted.  
This is everyday life in Philippi.

But when Paul comes and speaks the name of Jesus  
New freedom is given to a woman who had been exploited.  
By enduring an unjust beating and imprisonment  
They expose the injustice of the system itself.

When the Gospel comes to Philippi  
The city is turned upside down.  
The lives of Paul and Silas are turned upside down with it.

We Christians sometimes see ourselves  
As polite and quiet people,  
Who never ruffle any feathers  
And never get into any trouble.

We'll take a closer look at Paul,  
Then consider the abolitionist movement  
Or the civil rights movement.  
Those who follow Jesus disrupt the world around them.

The Gospel disrupts.  
But it also endures.

We see this in the description  
Of Paul and Silas' imprisonment.  
After being beaten with rods  
They were taken to a dingy dungeon  
Where their feet were locked in stocks.

They are rendered immobile,  
In a place with no food,  
No bathroom,  
And probably no light.

No one is coming to help them.  
No medic. No lawyer.  
All there is, is darkness, pain...  
And the sounds of the prison around them.

At this point most people would be crying for help  
Willing to cut any deal,  
to get out of the place.

But Paul and Silas aren't broken.

We are told that they are praying and singing,  
And that other prisoners are listening to them.  
Paul and Silas are drawing near to God in their suffering.  
And by drawing near they remain strong.

Most of us can't imagine our faith ever getting us into trouble.  
Most of us can't imagine if this happened  
That we could ever stand firm.

But Paul faced similar challenges repeatedly.  
And the history of Christianity is filled with the stories  
Of saints who have faithfully endured all sorts of persecution  
Statues have been erected at Westminster Abbey  
to honor modern believers who have died for their faith.

The Gospel disrupts.  
The Gospel endures.  
And the Gospel saves.

Paul and Silas are singing in their cell,  
When an earthquake shakes the building  
Bursting locked doors and breaking chains.

When the jailer arrives and surveys the scene  
He assumes the prisoners have all fled.  
Just as he is about to take his own life  
[an honorable exit for a terrible failure]  
Paul calls out and tells him to stop,  
that everyone is still there.

When the jailer sees what has happened:  
the doors open, the prisoners still present  
he knows something beyond him is at work.  
And in that moment, he realizes he needs rescue  
not from Rome,  
but from sin and death.  
'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' he asks.

Paul & Silas share the Gospel with him and his household  
And they are baptised.

The Gospel Saves.  
Most of us know this.  
We have our own personal stories...

But the question is not just that the Gospel saves...  
But how it saves.

Paul could have avoided all of this...  
Paul could have pulled out his 'get out of jail free card',  
His Roman Citizenship.  
But he doesn't do that till later.  
He and Silas endure unjust suffering.

And by watching them face suffering with courage

A man who might have otherwise had a closed heart  
Is now open to receive the Gospel message.  
God often uses suffering to bring others to faith.

The Gospel disrupts, the Gospel endures, the Gospel saves.  
Of course we are talking about the life of Paul.  
Paul is unique, different, we think.

The reality is Paul's life has been shaped by the life of Jesus.  
Jesus himself endured suffering he did not deserve  
in order to bring us salvation.  
And Jesus advances the Gospel  
through people who are willing to walk with him  
Through suffering, not just around it.

PAUSE

We expect life to include hardship.  
We know it takes effort to reach our goals  
related to education, or work, or our families.

Could it be that Jesus is inviting you  
To pursue higher goals, wider ambitions?  
Could it be that Jesus will lead you through  
Unjust suffering to meet these goals?

Yes we all love comfort and ease,  
But even more we want to live lives  
With lasting impact that are oriented to eternity.

For those who are willing to take the narrow road,  
But find that it is extraordinarily difficult  
Remember—God often uses even unjust suffering  
to bring others to faith

Thanks be to God. Amen.