

## **Unexpected Act**

Acts of Hope: Part 6 “Unexpected Act”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – May 29, 2022

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

**Readings:** Acts 16:16-34

**Reflection:** Psalm 97

**Greeting:** Surely God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. Praise the Lord! (*Isaiah 12:2*)

**Prayer:** Almighty God, through your only Son you overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. Grant that we who celebrate our Lord’s resurrection, by the renewing of your Spirit, arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 97

*The Lord is king! Let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him and consumes his adversaries on every side. His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples behold his glory. All servants of images are put to shame, those who make their boast in worthless idols; all gods bow down before him. Zion hears and is glad, and the towns of Judah rejoice because of your judgments, O God. For you, O Lord, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. You who love the Lord, hate evil; he guards the lives of his faithful; he rescues them from the hand of the wicked. Light dawns for the righteous and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name! (Psalm 97 NRSVue\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 97 and hear of God’s glory. That God gives us reason to rejoice. What gives you cause to celebrate today? How do you celebrate Christ in your life? How do you share in your celebration with others? Do you praise God even in difficult times? How do we share in the joy of our Risen Savior?

**Prayer:** O God, Holy One, our altar, and our cloud: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your temple. Accept the sacrifices we offer, and draw us into the fire of your Spirit. Help us with our doubts and fears and strengthen us in love as we come before you in prayer. May you guide us in all things; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **Sermon:**

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Acts chapter 16 verses 16 through 34.

*A One day, when we were on the way to the place for prayer, we met a slave woman. She had a spirit that enabled her to predict the future. She made a lot of money for her owners through fortune-telling. She began following Paul and us, shouting, "These people are servants of the Most High God! They are proclaiming a way of salvation to you!" She did this for many days. This annoyed Paul so much that he finally turned and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to leave her!" It left her at that very moment. Her owners realized that their hope for making money was gone. They grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the officials in the city center. When her owners approached the legal authorities, they said, "These people are causing an uproar in our city. They are Jews who promote customs that we Romans can't accept or practice." The crowd joined in the attacks against Paul and Silas, so the authorities ordered that they be stripped of their clothes and beaten with a rod. When Paul and Silas had been severely beaten, the authorities threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to secure them with great care. When he received these instructions, he threw them into the innermost cell and secured their feet in stocks. Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. All at once there was such a violent earthquake that it shook the prison's foundations. The doors flew open and everyone's chains came loose. When the jailer awoke and saw the open doors of the prison, he thought the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul shouted loudly, "Don't harm yourself! We're all here!" The jailer called for some lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He led them outside and asked, "Honorable masters, what must I do to be rescued?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your entire household." They spoke the Lord's word to him and everyone else in his house. Right then, in the middle of the night, the jailer welcomed them and washed their wounds. He and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. He brought them into his home and gave them a meal. He was overjoyed because he and everyone in his household had come to believe in God. (Acts 16:16-34 CEB+)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week's Scripture gives us a bit of an interesting read. We have Paul getting annoyed and then being thrown into jail. But there are some really fascinating things going on with the power plays involved in our reading today. And the reason I say that is because when Paul decides to cast the spirit out of the slave woman, Paul messes up somebody's income. This slave woman with a spirit that enabled her to predict the future is basically just being used by her owners to make money. Because there doesn't seem to be any concern about what this does to her. And it doesn't seem to be anything good for her because she's following Paul and his companions around shouting about them. So, when Paul gets sick of it, he casts the spirit out in the name of Jesus Christ. And of course, the spirit leaves her. But the owners are angry because they can't make money off of that fortune telling anymore. The moment they can't make money then they decide to turn Paul in for apparent customs that Romans can't accept or practice. Note that those didn't seem to be an issue until they couldn't make money. Paul has done the right thing and is beaten and thrown in jail for it. Because they had the power to do it. But then Paul shows what real power is.

Waiting in prison, Paul and Silas are singing and praying and the other prisoners are listening to their songs and their prayers. Then an earthquake strikes. Everyone's free! Now that they've been set free, they all leave right? Not exactly. The jailer thinks everybody has left and in despair he's about to kill himself. But then Paul shouts that they're all still there. When the jailer comes in, he wants to know what he can do to be rescued. Right there in the middle of the night, the jailer cleans Paul and Silas up and he and his whole household are baptized. Now, the reason that I mentioned Paul showing real power is that Paul and Silas and everybody else could have left the jail. There was nothing holding them there anymore. But they didn't leave. We quickly see the reason. The jailer would be in some serious trouble. Now we could try to rationalize about if the jailer were a good person, he wouldn't be holding them in jail. Paul doesn't see it that way though. And in response the jailer has his whole household baptized. The thing is, that that jailer is likely just doing his job. Day by day he is earning a living for his family. Had Paul just been thinking himself and what he wanted, he could have skipped out of there and not thought about it again. But Paul does think about it, and they remain. The jailer doesn't kill himself. He instead is saved with his whole household. Because Paul did the unexpected. He stayed.

That's the thing about our reading for today. We have Paul doing the unexpected and getting unexpected results. He heals a woman and is thrown in jail for it. Miraculously an earthquake comes and releases him from jail, and he stays. But there's a common thread. In our first instance, he sets the woman free from the spirit that she has because, regardless of what her owners want from her ability to tell fortunes, it doesn't seem to be good for her. And when they could have turned tail and run, they stayed so that Paul could share the good news with the jailer. Part of the unexpected is that we don't always expect people to do the right thing. We don't always expect people to think out what the right thing would be in a situation like that. But there's Paul, unshackled and set free, and he remains waiting for the jailer.

Because Paul doesn't want to get this man in trouble. Paul wants to help him. Paul wants him to be saved. The man guarding Paul's jail cell, the one he was thrown in for helping someone, and Paul wants him to be saved. Now we do have more similarity between these two instances. Because we have Paul helping two people that are in situations beyond their control. The slave woman has a spirit that her owners don't want to get rid of. The jailer is there doing his job when an earthquake frees everyone. Paul didn't have to consider either of these people. But he did because of his faith in Christ. Because Paul does the unexpected and reaches out to these people in need.

Paul didn't know what would happen in either case. He didn't know helping the woman would get him tossed in jail. He didn't know if the jailer would respond to the good news. Paul helps these people because they need help. Paul shares Christ with them because they need Christ. And I don't know if Paul actually has any more reason than that. But does Paul need more reason than that? Paul sees people in need, so he helps. Paul doesn't want to get someone in trouble if he can help it. Paul finds a way to bear witness even in the most difficult of times. Paul is there to share good news of Jesus Christ. I think there's something to be said for doing the right thing, even when it's going to get you in trouble with those in power. There's something to be said for doing the right thing even if it may personally cost you. That there's something about being able to stand up for what is right regardless of what the consequences will be. And that's what we see Paul do. And I think that's why it's unexpected. Because Paul does what's right, even if he may end up in jail. Even if it risks his own freedom. Paul does the right thing because of Christ. Paul does it with a clear conscience because he does it in the name of Christ, knowing he's doing what's right and what's good. And I think there's something for all of us to learn in that. That we can do the unexpected by always standing up for what is right, even if it's not going to be the easiest of routes for us. Even if it's not going to work out directly in our favor, we do what's right because it's right. We do what's good because it's good. And that because we love Christ, we love each other. And because we love each other, we love God more deeply. We help each other and we always act for what is best so that we aim to do no harm, to do good, and to stay in love with God. That no matter what happens, Christ is with us to always help us to do the right thing, even when it's unexpected. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Our Current Series – Acts of Hope**

Our current series will be looking at the Acts of the Apostles during the Easter season, with each week bringing a new act for us to look at.

April 24th – Act of Witness – Acts 5:17-32

May 1st – Act of Change – Acts 9:1-20

May 8th – Motherly Act – Acts 9:36-43

May 15th – Act of Acceptance – Acts 11:1-18

May 22nd – Called to Act – Acts 16:9-15

May 29th – Unexpected Act – Acts 16:16-34

June 5th – Act of the Spirit – Acts 2:1-21

**Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart
Ronnie Winstead	Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable
Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland	Ruth Ann Finley	Jodie Bunch
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Judy McCellan	Rosie Chancellor
Susie Callahan	Kenny Holmes	Ted Marrs	Darrell Quick
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Mammoser Family	Family of Albert White
Gary Pearce	Neal Ryan Family	Jackie Potter	
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Greg Williams	Family of Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte			

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