**June 2, 2019 Acts 16:16-34**

***Open Doors?***

**Scripture:** Acts 16:16-34 NRSV

(16)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. (17)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." (18)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. (19)But 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. (20)When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews (21)and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." (22)The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. (23)After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. (24)Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. (25)About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. (26)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. (27)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. (28)But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." (29)The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. (30)Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (31)They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (32)They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. (33)At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. (34)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.

**Notes:**

1. We meet a slave girl, who tells fortunes to those who ***pay***.
   1. Paul demands the ***spirit*** to leave the girl.
   2. We never hear of the ***girl*** again.
   3. Paul and Silas are thrown into ***prison***,
2. One would think that Paul would be ***discouraged***.
   1. Paul and Silas begin to ***pray*** and ***sing*** hymns.
   2. “the prisoners were ***listening***.”
3. When the spirit comes out of the girl, a ***door*** of opportunity opens for her to meet Christ.
   1. Think of the people we have opportunity to share with, where are they now, physically and ***spiritually***?
   2. We all are in need of ***liberation*** and ***freedom***,
   3. Live according to Jesus ***teachings***
4. What can we do to bring them to ***Jesus***?
   1. ***Develop*** a relationship with the lost spiritually
   2. Share with them what you know to be ***true***;
   3. ***Nurture*** the relationship we have with them.
5. Set an example of ***devotion*** to the Lord; ***devotion*** to all that he calls us to do.
   1. What ***example*** do we set?
   2. ***Integrate*** others into the body of believers?
   3. ***Invite*** others to participate in fellowship activities and the ministry of the church.

**Transcript:**

At the age of 22, I was making the transition from student to teacher. My emotions were erratic; one moment I felt all grown up I was ready to assume the role of adult, ready to begin to make my own way in the world, ready to be responsible for my actions and behavior. Then, as if a switch had been flipped, I wanted to stay a teenager a little longer; I did not want the responsibility of my debt in student loans, I didn’t want to be responsible for my actions or behavior.

But in the realm of life, I was on the threshold of the future. Life was going to change whether I wanted it to or not. The only thing I could do is try to maintain a little control over the changes that were going to be made in my life. Doors of change were opening and I was going to need to make a decision, and these decisions would impact my future, and the future of others.

And so, at this point in my life an event occurred. I was at my grandmother’s house and my younger cousins were there. One asked me what I would be called when I started teaching school, and I never even considered it till then, and I said, “I assume they’ll call me Mr. Davis.” With that it began, every time I would see them they would start the sing song, “MR. DAVIS,,, MR. DAVIS,,, MR. DAVIS,,, MR. DAVIS… It drove me crazy, following me around repeating over and over again; so I jumped into my car and sped off as fast as I could. I saw those cousins a few months ago and I was reminded of the time when they did this, and we shared a laugh about the whole thing, but deep in my heart I was hoping they would not say the words ever again.

The doors of change are opening and closing all around us. Every time we make life changing choices the doors of change are opening. Every time our desires are not able to be achieved, the doors of change close upon us, not allowing us to enter into the realm that we desire. The thing we must do is follow the leading of the Spirit, as we enter into the open doors that we are guided to, and as we pass by the doors that are closed to us, we must trust that the Lord did not want us to enter into that realm.

Last week we heard Paul’s story of doors being closed and others being opened; as he traveled on his second missionary journey; as he had his vision leading him to Philippi; as he went about the city meeting people; as he met the women and Lydia, his first converts by the river’s edge. But today things change; more doors of opportunity are closing, or are they opening? Let’s find out as we read from the Acts 16:16-34 our sermon passage today.

*(16)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. (17)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." (18)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. (19)But 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. (20)When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews (21)and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." (22)The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. (23)After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. (24)Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. (25)About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. (26)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. (27)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. (28)But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." (29)The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. (30)Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (31)They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (32)They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. (33)At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. (34)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.* (Acts 16:16-34 NRSV )

No doubt Paul, Silas, and Timothy are traveling together on this mission’s trip. But one must wonder if Luke is with them on this journey. Notice the use of the word “we” many times in the narration of events. It is well known that Luke wrote the Gospel bearing his name and the Acts of the Apostles. So it is safe to assume that Luke is with them on this journey. Why does this matter? His witness gives more credibility to the written text. Instead of this being a written account of what is narrated to the writer it is now firsthand information, Luke is a witness to this account as well as Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

Immediately following the account of Lydia’s conversion and baptism, we meet a young slave girl. She has a spirit of divination, meaning that her masters hire her out to tell the fortunes of those who are willing to pay. It states that her owners make a great deal of money for her services. As Paul passes down the street, the slave girl begins to follow him. As she follows she shouts out for all to hear, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” She continues to do this every time that she sees Paul on the street. Day after day, shouting it out as loud as she can, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

Paul is beginning to get disgusted with her, much like I did with my cousins shouting, “MR. DAVIS,,, MR. DAVIS,,, MR. DAVIS,,, MR. DAVIS…” I can understand why he was disgusted with her actions; I can understand why Paul did what he did next. After daily badgering of Paul and his companions , Paul turns to this slave girl, and in frustration, says, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And like that the spirit leaves the girl. Paul is able to now go on with his work; Right? WRONG!!!

The slave girl’s owners are not happy with these events. Paul has just eliminated the money making ability of the slave girl. Her owners no longer have any financial benefits of this slave girl. Her owners no longer have a reason to keep her, her owners no longer have any reason to supply this girls needs, and we never hear from her again… But even more detrimental to Paul, is the fact that the slave girls owners drag Paul and Silas into the marketplace and file a complaint to the authorities against Paul and his companions. “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews (21)and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.” The accusation is not exactly what is going on here. Paul’s accusers are angry because they are losing income. The accusation has to do with practice of religious activities that are in opposition to the Roman government. The bystanders get stirred up and Paul and Silas are stripped and beaten. After this they were thrown into prison, into the most secure location of the prison, the innermost cells, and their feet were placed into stocks, and their custody is handed over to the Jailer.

One would think that Paul would be discouraged. But if he is, he doesn’t show it. Paul continues to share the gospel with the prisoners, then as darkness falls upon the prison, and midnight approaches, Paul and Silas commence to pray and sing hymns to God, and the scripture makes note that “the prisoners were listening.” It is in the midst of this prayer meeting, during their worship that there was an earthquake, so violent that the very foundation of the prison was shaking. The doors fly open; the stocks fall off of Paul and Silas’ feet; in fact the chains fall from every prisoner; as if a divine act of mercy opened the doors of freedom to each of the captives.

The jailer, who is responsible for the security of the prison and the captivity of the prisoners, panics. If all the prisoners escape he will surely be thrown in jail with them. So he does what many with absolutely no hope would do, he draws his sword, and prepares to take his own life. While this may relieve him of his disgrace, it would leave his family devastated, distraught, and without support for their daily needs.

Just before the Jailer thrusts the sword into his torso, Paul calls out to him, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” The jailer goes and checks that what Paul says is true. He falls down trembling in front of Paul and Silas, “What must I do to be saved?” the jailer asks. And Paul responds, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Doors are opening and closing like crazy in this chapter of Acts. Last week the doors opened for Paul to go to Philippi. After arriving in Philippi the doors were opening for him to minister to the people. The doors opened for Lydia and her household, and they believed and were baptized. But this week the doors are swinging in all directions, opened and closed. Paul is walking down the street and this slave girl begins shouting that Paul and Silas “slaves of the Most High God”. This obviously is irritating Paul, but why, why wouldn’t he want the people to know who he really is? Perhaps he didn’t want to be associated with a fortune teller, perhaps he didn’t want the publicity.

The doors seem to be opening wider until Paul demands the spirit to come out of the girl. When the spirit comes out of the girl, a door of opportunity opens for her to meet Christ. But the word doesn’t say that Paul shared the gospel with her. The word doesn’t say that she accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior. The word doesn’t say that she is baptized. The word says that the spirit comes out of her, and that is the last we hear of the girl.

This makes me wonder, what about all the people we have opportunity to share with, but because of our fears we do not open up a dialogue? We tell ourselves the time isn’t right, we just don’t take the opportunity. Where are they now, physically and spiritually?

What about those people who come either here to the church or to you personally? They show interest, they only need somebody to nudge them along, point them in the right direction. But again we fail to share the gospel with them; do you think they will be saved?

What about those who have come to the church and asked Jesus into their heart; but have fallen away, why do they leave, why do they fall back into sin? Some leave because they do not feel as if they have any friends here. Some leave because they feel out of place. Some leave because they feel they are fighting their spiritual battles all alone. And they fall back into sin, because they have not developed a support system within the church; they were not connected with others in the congregation. Alone and discouraged they feel it is easier just to give up living for Jesus.

We all are in need of liberation and freedom, but many times these freedoms come at the expense of others; our life is a series of open and closed doors that help to guide us, but we must choose which open doors to enter and understand that some doors may be closed for a reason. We must strive to live our lives in accordance with Jesus teachings and consider what impact our actions may have on others, we must be careful not to create collateral damage, what can we do?

What can we do to bring them to Jesus? We can look at what Paul did with the Jailer. When the prison doors opened, the jailer thought he was done, but Paul reassured them that they were still there. This was the beginning of their relationship. The Jailer knew he was in peril and that Paul had just saved his life. He probably heard about the slave girl and what she was saying. He most likely heard about Paul commanding the spirit to leave the girl. He most definitely heard of why Paul was in prison. He knew who Paul was and what he was doing. So the Jailer asked what he needed to do to be saved spiritually, then Paul shared with him and his family about Jesus. The Jailer, as well as his whole family, accepted Jesus into their lives; they were saved and baptized, just like Lydia.

We can develop a relationship with those who are lost spiritually. Get to know them on a personal level, and allow them to get to know you on a personal level as well. Become a friend, listening and sharing with them. When you are asked about your reason for going to church or about your relationship with Jesus, share with them what you know to be true. Share with them that we are all sinners. Share with them that Jesus came into the world to save us from our sin; that he died on a cross to pay the price for our sin. That he died and was raised again, conquering death, promising forgiveness and eternal life in God’s Kingdom, for all who repent and believe in him.

What can we do to help them stay in the relationship with Jesus? We need to nurture the relationship we have with them. We need to help them learn more about living the life of a Christian. We do this through mentoring relationships, living our life as an example, just as Jesus lived his life as an example for us. Discuss our shortcomings and how we strive to overcome them; stressing the need to ask forgiveness when we stumble, and extend forgiveness to those who fall. We do this through small group studies, discipleship at its best, gathering together to learn more about God’s word and what it says in relationship to us. We do this through attendance in church services.

We need to set an example of devotion to the Lord; this includes devotion to all that he calls us to do. We set an example for every person who is watching. We commit to what we truly love and desire. If we proclaim to be a follower of Christ, yet live like we are not associated with him, then we are setting a bad example; an example that other relationships are more important than our relationship with the Lord; an example that other activities are more important than our attendance in church.

If they watch us long enough, they will begin to adopt our standards, just think of our children who model their lives after us, what example do we set? Do we want to be responsible for others falling away? We must set an example that is above reproach.

What can we do to integrate others into the body of believers? We must first accept them as fellow believers, greeting them, smiling at them, talking with them; there must be no division in the church, none. We must make others feel welcome; nobody should leave this place feeling as if they do not fit in, especially because of our actions. We must invite others to participate in fellowship activities, and we must invite others to participate in the ministry of the church.