

The Shaking of the Foundations 7 Easter C

Imagine that sitting in the pew in front of you today is a person just released from prison? How does that change your view of that person? Would you still relate to him in the same way?

Paul and Silas had been thrown in prison for breaking the law. They had been preaching the gospel in Philippi of Macedonia – not a common practice then and now. Wherever they went, preaching the gospel had upset and upturned the culture of people's lives. It was expected. The gospel of a man once known to be a teacher, convicted of preaching against the grain of established religion, got him crucifixion. What's more this rabbi was experienced to be alive, raised from the tomb. The same power that made him alive was now operating in the lives of Paul and Silas.

And now they encountered a girl enslaved by men for her ability to tell fortunes. She earned them a good living. The lying spirit within her was attracted to Paul and Silas. She followed the saying that they were preaching a way of salvation. What they were preaching however, was Jesus as Lord, the Way, the Truth and Life. That's quite a bit different from a way of salvation.

Now you may disagree with what I am about to say. That's okay because most of us are Episcopalians and it is our nature to disagree. Yet I say to you, it is an old lie of this world and the spirit of this world to get people to believe that Jesus Lord is a way to salvation – in other words he is ONE of many ways. All religions are equal; they are all going to achieve the same goal of living a good life, justice for all people and righteousness by works alone. I believe that all religions are equal and that unless they recognize the Spirit of Christ within their religion they are empty and futile. Without the power of the Risen Christ alive in its members all religion is dead – including above all Christianity. Yes, Christianity is a waste of time and a delusion with out the Risen Christ.

Now after you swallow and the lump in your throat clears I want you to think about how what I just said could be true. Then consider that Paul and Silas had after healing that girl had just disrupted a local economy, broken Roman law by disturbing the peace, advocated betrayal of allegiance to a new ruler of men and made a jail break. Now folks how religious is that? Can someone tell me what kind of religion would support the breaking of the law? None would or it would have been crushed in a heartbeat. That's why the followers

of Jesus Christ cannot be stopped. That's why when Christians are told to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ you had better leave your religion behind – why?

BECAUSE IT JUST GETS IN THE WAY!

Paul and Silas may have been identified as Jews and they were. They may have been beaten and thrown into prison unjustly and they were. Yet, they in spite of it all were able to reach one girl and one family with the hope and promise of the Risen Lord – and they did it without religion. They ministered the life changing, transforming power of Jesus Christ by keeping his word. It was not Judaism that brought them new life. It was not Christianity that brought them new life –there was no such thing yet.

THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST GAVE THEM LIFE!

Lutheran pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, waited for his freedom while he was in the Nazi Flossenburg prison. In several of his letters to his good friends he noted that his fellow inmates and young prison guards would dialogue with him about faith, life, evil, and God. He had confided in some that he had taken part in an attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler and overturn the Third Reich. He justified the murder of a tyrant. This led him to a new understanding of ethics which he was never able to complete.

What came as a surprise to Bonhoeffer was that he had encountered in those prison cells Christian faith from those who were raised gypsy, atheist, Jewish, etc. Many as well were outside the church who claimed Christ as their own. They taught him about a religion-less Christianity. This theologian who had his PhD at the age of twenty-one had come to the conclusion that Christ Risen was present in hearts and minds of all these prisoners.

Perhaps that is not a surprise to you. Our Lord did say a prayer that asked that his disciples might all be COMPLETELY one. He prayed this prayer so that the world “may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” He prayed this prayer, “that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them.” This is religion-less Christianity. And this Jesus-Risen Lord has shaken the foundations of what it means to be a person of faith. He alone has gone beyond the institution of the Church to live and dwell in all who confess his name.

He belongs to the ages and not to us alone. He is above culture and religion. He is Lord and he has transcended earth and heaven to unite us to Almighty God. Let us honor and worship him now with our lives as we are filled with the promise of his Spirit. Amen.