Our next scripture will be from the book of Acts. The book of Acts shares stories from the early church. It was written by the same person that wrote the gospel of Luke. Last week we read the portion of the Scripture that comes just before the passage that we are about to read.

Just prior to this passage, we read that Paul and Silas are followers of Jesus Christ who are on journeys to different towns situated around the Mediterranean Sea. Paul and Silas are on journeys to tell others about Jesus so that they too can become followers of Jesus.

In the 16th chapter of Acts we read that Paul and Silas set sail and end up in the town called Philippi. In Philippi they go to a place that they assume is a place of prayer. At the place of prayer, they meet Lydia who opens her heart to what Paul and Silas have to say about Jesus. Lydia and her family are all baptized and Lydia welcomes Paul and Silas into her home.

In this text that we are about to read, Paul and Silas decide to return to this place of prayer where they encountered Lydia. And this time they meet another woman.

As we read this passage, pay attention to two characters and what happens to them during the events when they are featured and what happens to them afterward. The first character that I invite you to pay attention to is the girl that is enslaved and the second person I invite you to pay attention to is the man who is the jailer.

**Read Acts 16:16-34 (Letarshia)**

Today in worship we are celebrating and recognizing transitions. We are celebrating our graduates from high school and college and their tremendous accomplishments. We are offering them blessings on their next steps in life.

But we are also recognizing other transitions that many of us are experiencing right now. We are highlighting transitions from the workplace into retirement which is a really big transition. We are offering a blessing to one family moving to the other side of the world.

During the Prayers of the People later in the worship service we will invite others to lift up transitions that you may be going through in life. Some of us may want to name our transition out loud while others of us may want to offer up silent prayers about our transitions.

Transitions in life provide lots of emotions. Some transitions are eagerly anticipated while others bring great angst. Most transitions are a mixture of emotions.

To help give us guidance concerning transitions, we are going to look back to two characters in the story that we just read from Acts. Before we read the story, I asked you to pay attention to what happens to each of these characters. What did we discover?

The first person that Paul and Silas encounter in this story is a girl who is enslaved in two ways. She is enslaved by a spirit of divination that allows her to be a fortune teller and she is enslaved by men who take advantage of her and enslave her for their own profit.

When Paul and Silas go to the place of prayer, this woman annoys them by shouting out that “these men are slaves of the Most High God who proclaim the way of salvation.” She does this for many days. Finally, being very much annoyed, Paul says to the spirit to leave this woman. And that is what happens. The spirit leaves the woman at that very hour.

The men who controlled the girl as a slave are not happy. They are not happy because they used this girl’s abnormality to make money from her. The owners then drag Paul and Silas before the local magistrates. The magistrates order Paul and Silas to be stripped of their clothing, beaten, and imprisoned.

So, we know what happens to Paul and Silas. But what happens to the girl? What happens to her? We are not told. I wish we were told something. Anything. I wish that we were told that her owners released her and that she returned to her family where she was happily welcomed back in.

I wish that we were told that she became a follower of Jesus Christ and went around Asia Minor proclaiming the good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ. But the story goes painfully silent at this point. We are told nothing about what happens to this girl after she is given freedom from the spirit.

So, what does her story teach us about our own transitions? We may not want to hear it, but I think her story teaches us that the freedoms that we think we are achieving in our transition may not be as freeing as we expect them to be.

Graduation from high school means greater responsibilities and the prospect of adulting. Graduation means facing our own decisions without the comfort of teachers and others who may have supported us along the way. Graduation means more difficult educational challenges and more responsible jobs.

Retirement can be one of the most stressful times in a person’s life. We look forward to what we think retirement will mean but then we may face some physical challenges that get more and more difficult. Physical and mental health changes which impact us beyond what we had planned.

Marriages can face some real conflict as two people who have had some space between them now find themselves having to adjust to a new normal. Or one spouse has to assume greater responsibility in the relationship than before.

But there are other transitions that others of us are undertaking. Some of us have recently moved to this area while others of us are moving away. There is excitement and there is concern. And like this girl in Acts we don’t know what will happen to us on the other side of our transition.

But it is at this point that I invite us to allow the man who is the jailer to speak to us in our time of transition. When we are introduced to the jailer, he is preparing to commit suicide because he fears that his prisoners have all escaped because of a violent earthquake.

But Paul and Silas quickly catch him before he does this. This transition in his life leads him to want to carry out violence against himself because he feels that this is his only option. But he is then consoled by Paul and Silas and then taught by Paul and Silas.

Paul teaches him that this transition is necessary for him to meet Jesus in a real and authentic way. The jailer is so excited that he asks what he must do to be saved. He is told to believe and trust in Jesus. Believe and trust. The man responds by accepting baptism and then providing a meal for Paul and Silas.

We don’t know what is on the other side of our transitions. But if we believe and trust God during the transitions, we may find our faith in God strengthened. We may discover who God is in a more authentic way. We may find out what it means to be truly saved and experience God’s freedom.

Blessings will be offered today for all of us going through transitions. We will also be offered the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

May this blessing and this sacrament be a reminder that God is with us during the transition and on the other side of the transition. AMEN.

++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++

-Given: June 2, 2019 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)