

052922 "Praying and Singing" Acts 16:16-25

We have had such beautiful days since I saw you last. Warmth and sun in the beauty of summer so we could get outside and enjoy nature. Then sunsets so glorious, a masterpiece never to be repeated, and here we are, back again. In a season like this, however, last Tuesday we heard some tragic news. Loving children and beloved educators were killed at Robb Elementary School on May 24 in the deadliest school shooting in Texas history. Every time something like this happens, my heart feels really heavy and helpless. I pray that God's special comfort and peace will be with the victims of this shooting and their families and friends who loved them.

The relationship between Paul and the church of Philippi were very close. Paul originally had planned to witness the gospel in the region of Asia Minor, but then Paul saw a vision in which a Macedonian appeared and said, "come over and help us." Accepting this as the guidance of God, Paul changed course and crossed the sea to Europe. The first place he arrived was Philippi, where the first church in Europe was built.

In Philippi, they met Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. And she and her household were baptized. When Paul expels a demonic spirit from a fortune-telling slave girl in the name of Jesus, her owners accuse Paul and Silas of illegally promoting a foreign god. The crowd and the city officials beat them with rods and put them in jail. Verse 23 says, "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." They treated Paul and Silas like felons.

Only later do they realize their mistake: Paul and Silas are both Roman citizens,

and you can't punish Roman citizens without a trial! The next morning, Paul and Silas refuse to leave quietly, politely insisting that their civil rights have been violated. So, the officials came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city.

Anyway, imagine that Paul and Silas are in prison now. They were beaten with rods and severely whipped, so they must have been bleeding and bruised, right? Some of you might want to ask, "Pastor, were they not filled with the Holy Spirit?" I'm pretty sure they were but because Paul and Silas were filled with the Holy Spirit, did they not get hurt even if they were beaten? Or at least felt no pain? I don't think so. Even if you are filled with the Holy Spirit, it hurts if you get hit with rods. Even if you are filled with the Holy Spirit, your heart hurts when you are faced with difficult things.

Paul and Silas came to this city to witness the gospel. They have faced such difficulties while doing God's work. How would you feel if you were Paul and Silas? Maybe if I had been in their situation, I might have resented or complained against God. "God, why have you forsaken me? God, why is it that you don't do anything about this situation?"

But look at verse 25. What are Paul and Silas doing now? It says, "About midnight Paul and Silas were **praying and singing hymns to God**, and the prisoners were listening to them" (Amen). No one wants to be beaten and imprisoned for preaching the gospel. When difficulties arise, resentment and complaining are natural choices. But they did not make a natural choice, but instead they were praying and singing hymns to God... (maybe they complained too but they quickly settled down)

The Bible gives us an important message of faith today. When we pray in difficult situations and rather praise God, the amazing works of God happen.

While Paul and Silas were in jail, an earthquake freed them of their chains, but they stayed. It was surprising that an earthquake occurred and the prison doors were opened at that moment, but it is even more surprising to me that they didn't escape from there and God's work of salvation continued through this event. Even through these difficulties, God had a plan to save the jailer and his family.

"That looks like a sober man, I think I'll hire him to cut wood for me." That was said of a man on the streets of Lake Rice, Canada, as he walked along carrying a wood saw and a sawhorse. The response from a man nearby was, "That's Joseph Scriven. He wouldn't cut wood for you because you can afford to hire him. He only cuts wood for those who don't have money enough to pay." That seemed to be the philosophy and attitude of Scriven, a devoted member of the Plymouth Brethren Church. He had a sincere desire to help those who were truly destitute.

Joseph was born in 1819, in Ireland. His parents had financial means enough to afford a wonderful educational opportunity for their son. He was enrolled in Trinity College in Dublin where he graduated with a bachelor's degree. In this young man, Ireland had the prospect of a great citizen with high ideals and notable aspirations. He fell in love with a young lady who was eager to spend her life with him. However, on the day before their wedding she fell from her horse, while crossing a bridge over the River Bann and was drowned in the water below. Joseph stood helplessly watching from the other side.

In an effort to overcome his sorrow, he began to wander. By age 25 his travels had taken him to an area near Port Hope, Canada. He became highly regarded by the people of that area. He tutored some of the local children in their school work. It was there he met a wonderful young lady, Elisa Roche, and again fell in love. They had exciting plans to be married. However, tragedy reared its

ugly head once again and she died of pneumonia before they could wed. As indicated earlier in this story, he labored in Port Hope among the impoverished widows and sick people. He often served for no wages and even shared his clothes with those less fortunate than himself.

On an occasion when Joseph became ill, a friend who was visiting with him discovered a poem near his bed and asked who had written it. Scriven said, "The Lord and I did it between us." He thought the poem would, perhaps, bring some spiritual comfort to his Mom, who still lived in Ireland. Scriven had not intended that anyone else should see it.

Later Charles Converse, an attorney and composer, wrote the musical setting used today: What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry. Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry. Everything to God in prayer.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, do not get me wrong. Praying and singing will not magically get rid of COVID-19, nor will it take away what frightens you or fix your problems right away, whatever they might be. However, praying and singing does give you a firm foundation on which to stand: your relationship with a loving God. There is a lot of hurt in the world. It can even seem at times that our world is out of control, be it because of the virus, or political divisions, or the troubling issues we deal with in our lives. We know, however, that praying and singing will always place us directly in the presence of a loving God. God will show us the way. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you and your family, and your business, and your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.