

Straight from the "Hart"

June 12, 2022



Opening Prayer Lord, we have gathered that you may keep us steady in faith as we journey with you and to you as the waters of your Spirit flow over us and enrich our lives. All of our gifts and resources and time are made possible by your love for us. What we return of our resources and ourselves is an expression of our love for you. Accept them and us to make a positive difference in your world. In Jesus name, Amen.

Call to Worship Come to worship, come to Jesus – for he is our life, our joy, our all. He is our true friend who watches over us and provides us with his strength as we follow him, blessing us with a beautiful life that has no end of eternal joy.

(Inspired by portions of "Jesus is All the World to Me" by Will L Thompson)

Music We follow him by reaching out with God's love to others, and to put that love into practice, we need his power, his wisdom, and his courage. Let's sing...

God of Grace and God of Glory

God of grace and God of glory, on your people pour your power;
crown thine ancient church's story, bring her bud to glorious flower.

Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour*,

Lo, the hosts of evil round us scorn the Christ, assail his ways.
From the fears that long have bound us free our hearts to faith and praise.

Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days*,

Cure your children's warring madness; bend our pride to your control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.

Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, lest we miss your kingdom's goal*,

Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore;

let the gift of your salvation be our glory evermore.

Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, serving you whom we adore*,

(* The last phrase is repeated) CCLI # 2561297

Theme We need wisdom, courage, and a powerful dose of determination because as we will see in today's stories of Peter, Silas, Paul, and the fortune teller; introducing new concepts can be very challenging because it often meets great resistance, as in this true story. (Note: names in italics means phonetic pronunciation)

210 years ago, in Coupvray (*koo ver ay*), a small town of about 600 people not far from Paris or (*Paree* if you want to be French) -- a young three-year-old boy, named (*Lou-ee Bye*) loved to stand in his father's workshop and watch him skillfully cut and sew tough leather hides into saddles and harnesses. Sometimes father would with give *Lou-ee* small scraps and he would pretend he was fitting them together. On one such day, father examined his work and decided he needed a different tool and he crossed the room to find it. Little *Lou-ee* saw an opening. He reached up and grabbed an awl and began poking at his scrap leather, he stabbed at it harder and harder to try and force the awl through the material. But his little fingers lost their grip and the sharp tool bounced up into his left eye. They rushed him to the doctor, but the damage was too severe, and he lost his sight in that eye. Then --- an infection spread to the other eye, and he lost all his sight.

In those days, not just communities, but even families often treated the blind with great neglect or cruelty, but in this little town, everyone watched out for *Lou-ee*. They listened for the tap of his cane. They stopped their own work to help him cross the street or go around a corner or count the number of clicks – taps of the cane - to get to various places. Sometimes *Lou-ee* and his father would walk together. *Lou-ee* asked his father what color the sky was that day. He'd answer, "As blue as can be." *Lou-ee* lost his sight at such a young age it was getting harder and harder to remember the beauty of such sights and colors.

He did learn to help his father in the shop, handing him tools and pieces of leather. He also went to school with his old friends, and they were surprised at how well he could learn by listening and memorizing his lessons. He loved talking to his teacher about history and geography, and to the town priest about music and bible stories. But he was unhappy because he wanted to be able to read and write like his classmates.

One day his teacher told him about the National Institute for the Young Blind that had books that blind people could learn to read. *Lou-ee* begged his parents to send him there. The village church helped them find money to pay the cost. [Did you hear that? The local church...helped them find money to pay the cost.] When *Lou-ee* was 10, he and his father traveled to Paris to enroll. The first thing he asked his new teachers was if they would be able to teach him to read. The school was experimenting with a new way of teaching the blind to read. They had printed some books with large, raised letters on the pages. By tracing the shape of the letters with their fingers, the students could make out words and sentences.

Lou-ee discovered that the raised letters had to be so big that even a very short story, it filled many pages. A single book could weigh a hundred pounds, and it took a very long time to read just a few paragraphs. They were also very expensive to make, so the school had very few of them.

Nevertheless, the boy from Coupvray studied hard and learned quickly. Because of his combination of love for music, and keen hearing, and quick fingers, and sharp memory, he excelled on the piano and cello. He spent his free hours at the organ in a nearby church, and before long began playing for the services there. But all this only made him long to be able to read and write all the more... Not only words, but music notes as well... He lay awake every night thinking over the problem, because if people who could not see were to learn as much as others, they had to find a way to be able to read and write.

One day he heard about army captain Charles Barbier (*Sharl Bar-bee-ay*). He had invented a method of sending messages in the dark so his soldiers could read messages without any light at all -- by using dots and dashes raised on paper. Soldiers ran their fingers over the code and read without using light. *Lou-ee* met with him and the captain was happy to demonstrate his system. He punched a few holes on a piece of paper with an instrument very much like the awl that had destroyed *Lou-ee's* own sight. The captain explained how certain combinations of dots and dashes made words and sentences.

Lou-ee knew the captain's system was too cumbersome to work for the blind, but it had the essence of what they did need. Night after night, month after month he worked on *changing and refining the system so it would work for his people. He met resistance.* He not only had the difficult challenge of perfecting the system itself, some viewed his work with suspicion. Some officials at the Institute resented his trying to change things. [Have you ever heard that story before? 😊] They had spent a fortune on books with raised letters and saw no need to go to a new system based on little bumps. They frowned on his efforts, arguing that writing invented solely for blind people would isolate them even more from the rest of society.

Nevertheless, at 17, they let him become a teacher at the Institute. By day he taught the students how to read the raised letter books, and by night and into the early morning hours, he continued working on his new system, carefully punching holes, testing patterns, searching for the right combinations, until he fell asleep amidst his tools and papers. Except for his beloved music, he gave all his spare

time to the effort – [and this is what the story says] *always cheerful and brave and confident of success.*

By the time he was 20, he completed his system using various patterns of 1 to 6 raised dots. He designed a little punch tool to write with, and after a while he could write almost as fast as someone could talk, imagine that in French which I think is a faster language than English! He could even read and write music using his system.

Word spread. Students came to his room secretly at night to learn the new method. *Lou-ee* punched out Shakespeare and other classics for them to read. News continued to spread until he received letters from all over the world. And yet resistance continued. Some saw its value, but they just did not care. Others were envious or resentful. Others, including teachers at his Institute, were still simply locked into their old way of doing things and unwilling to try anything new, and they also tried to ensure that no one else would ever learn to read that way.

But *Lou-ee* did not give up. He continued to refine and promote his idea – always hoping for a day when blind people all over the world would have a chance to read and write as he could. He continued punching out books, teaching any blind person desiring to learn, and talking and demonstrating his system to anyone who would listen.

His untiring efforts took a toll on his health, and for a while it seemed as though everything would pass away with him. But in the last years of his life, several places throughout Europe began recognizing his work, and more blind people began to discover his raised dots. In a hospital bed a few weeks before his death, he said to a friend “Oh unsearchable mystery of the human heart! I am convinced that my mission on earth is finished.” He died two days after his 43rd birthday. But his system continued to grow and is now the accepted method of reading and writing for those who cannot see. Books became a part of the lives of the blind because a 15-year-old Frenchman (French boy) named *Loo ee Bye*, or if you say it in English – Louis Braille – overcame resistance and devoted his life to searching for and finding a better way. End of story.

Peter, Paul, Silas, and others also had to dig deep to find the power, wisdom, and grace to refine and develop and promote and *cheerfully, and bravely and and confidently* persist in their message about Jesus Christ, which was hard enough. They too found resistance all around them – eventually even from the churches

they founded, but immediately from opposing religious faiths and powerful people in their culture. Listen to a summary of the first of 3 three stories today.

Reading

King Herod began arresting church people. He executed John's brother, James. He saw that this pleased the Jews. Therefore, to increase his power and political approval ratings, he had Peter thrown in prison under heavy guard. Herod's plan was that after Passover, he would bring Peter out to be publicly tried and probably executed. --



The church was praying for him. -- The night before his trial, Peter was sleeping between two guards, bound in chains, with additional sentries at the entrance. An angel appeared. A light shone in his cell. The angel struck Peter to wake him and told him to get dressed. Peter's chains fell off and he dressed. The angel led him passed the guards and to the city gate which opened for them unaided. They walked on into the city. Then the angel left him. Peter thought he was having a vision, but now he realized it had actually happened and he was free. He went to the home where many of them were praying and knocked on the door. A servant came to the door and recognized his voice, but instead of opening the door, ran to tell everyone else. They didn't believe her. But Peter kept knocking so they came to the door. They were astonished. Peter told his story, told them to tell others about it, and then left for another place.

Summary of Acts 12:1-17 (NIV)

Music I love that story. Do you get the irony? They are raying, *earnestly* the Bible says, for Peter and his deliverance; and then he shows up at the door, and they say. "Oh, he is not there!" We have a lot to learn, don't we? God's grace triumphs, freeing Peter from a physical prison so that he could continue to proclaim life and health and peace in the name of Jesus. And Jesus can free us from whatever seeks to imprison us. Let's sing....



**O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing (vv 1-4);
and Glory to God, and Praise and Love (vv 4,13)**

O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of his grace!

My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad the honors of thy name.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease;
'tis music in the sinner's ears, 'tis life, and health, and peace.

He breaks the power of canceled sin, he sets the prisoner free;
his blood can make the foulest clean; his blood availed for me.

Then with my heart I first believed, believed with faith divine,
power with the Holy Ghost received to call the Savior mine.

Look unto him, ye nations, own your God, ye fallen race!
Look, and be saved through faith alone, be justified by grace!

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Music: All the nations can look to his grace because the Spirit of Pentecost descends on all who turn to him in faith, and when he chooses to do so, there is no doubt of his presence. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing...

Sweet, Sweet Spirit

There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place,
and I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord;
there are sweet expressions on each face,
and I know they feel the presence of the Lord,
Sweet Holy Spirit, sweet heavenly Dove,
stay right here with us, filling us with your love;
and for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise;
without a doubt we'll know that we have been revived
when we shall leave this place.

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Pastor's Prayer

Almighty God, you sit on your throne above all, and yet through Jesus you have freely chosen to live and walk among us, even among those who refuse to acknowledge your presence or who you are. We come to you as our refuge and sanctuary from the struggles of our weeks, and we put our hope in you when despondency and despair persistently haunt our spirits. Comfort us and/or convict us with the stillness of your in-spiriting presence. Continue enabling us to sense your open, inviting arms and to trust in the strength of your hands – for you desire to free us from the chains of evil temptations and heal us from intentional or accidental wounds, that we may continue to take confidence in you and in your saving deeds and your powerful providential care. It is with assurance of who you

are and what you desire for your people that we place our requests and our praises into your hands -- **Praises and Petitions** We continue to pray * for Sabrina Allred recovering from surgery, for Parker who is having seizures, for a friend's extended family relative, name Butch, whose heart has been very seriously damaged and nearly didn't survive twice Friday night, and they are consulting on what to do * for Gary White, who is seriously struck with covid * and for Evan, who works for the daughter of one of our online viewers, who was working under a truck which fell on him and drove his femur through his hip and are having is having reconstruction surgery with a metal plate... He will be down for 12 weeks and he has a baby due in 6 weeks, * and Pat Schleh requests prayers for her brother – his lung cancer is minor (1A) and will only require radiation, * for Pat Schleh's friend Jackie who is recovering from knee surgery, * Pat Coleman asks prayer for the Bugis family as they grieve the death of their son John Bugis, * Margaret Melville requests prayers for healing for her friend Judy who has cancer, fell and injured her spine, * and also for another friend Shelley Whitehead who will have cancer surgery next week, * and we also pray for Marty Hansen who will have a complete knee replacement next Friday, * many requests, and there are surely others among us who remain on our hearts and minds who have not been mentioned, or have not been mentioned recently. We lift them all up to you now knowing that in your timing and in your way, your will will be accomplished in them and through them. --- Now, loving God open our ears to hear your word and draw us closer to you, that the whole world may be one with you as you are one with us in Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray. **LORD'S PRAYER.**

Introduction to Bible Reading Two weeks ago we heard about a prayer meeting where an Asian woman became the first European Christian. She invited Paul and his team to her home, and it became the house church in Philippi. A church with whom Paul grew very close. But it wasn't all rosy in the community -- as Luke goes on to describe:

Bible Reading

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name

of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her. When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Acts 16:16-24 (NIV)

Music We don’t always know what may come our way, Peter was jailed, but then freed and led out to his next stage of life – and at this point, Paul too has been locked away. We don’t know what awaits in our future, but we do know that God will stand by us and save us. Let’s confidently sing ...

Stand By Me (vv 1,3,4) (Words in parens are an “echo”)

When the storms of life are raging, stand by me; (stand by me)
when the storms of life are raging, stand by me. (stand by me)

When the world is tossing me like a ship upon the sea,
thou who rulest wind and water, stand by me. (stand by me)

In the midst of faults and failures, stand by me; (stand by me)
in the midst of faults and failures, stand by me. (stand by me)

When I’ve done the best I can, and my friends misunderstand,
thou who knowest all about me, stand by me. (stand by me)

In the midst of persecution, stand by me; (stand by me)
in the midst of persecution, stand by me. (stand by me)

When my foes in war array undertake to stop my way,
thou who rescued Paul and Silas, stand by me. (stand by me)

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Sermon Accepted: Jailer

Information is not an end in itself. What counts is what we do with what we know.

What do we do with our knowledge?

We all know that, right? John the Baptist had the right information and used it to pave the way for Jesus’ entrance into the world and into ministry. Two weeks ago, we heard about the Asian woman we called Lydia who sought the correct

information at a prayer meeting, and when she discovered it through Paul's message, became the first recorded European to accept Christ. Louis Braille sought and found the right information for his mission, overcame obstacles and created a useful tool that paved a way forward for the blind all over the world. And now we have a fortune teller who has the right information -- but uses it neither to accept Christ nor to pave a way for others to receive the news from Paul. Instead, she sarcastically mocked him, I'm not used to mocking so it is hard for me to do this, but I'll do it the best I can: [spoken derisively]: "These men are servants of the most high God, who are telling you the way to be saved." Think about someone screaming that behind you wherever you go throughout the town? Her biting tone eventually drew Paul's ire to a breaking point.

We cannot control how people are going to react when we share what we know, or what they do with what they know -- but we can control how we are going to receive what others know -- and how we present what we know to others. (So – our sides – we can only control ourselves). Have we used our knowledge of faith to enter into a relationship with Jesus? Have we used our knowledge of Jesus to represent him in a way that draws people to him -- or increases anger about him and to reject, or at least resist him?

We live in a culture which increasingly desires not to reach, but to shun -- even

How do we deal with differences?

destroy (metaphorically if not literally) those who think differently than themselves. Yet Paul, irked in anger by this consistent ridiculing message, whirled around and – **healed** her. This was an extraordinary situation which meant Paul could not simply teach her new information – she already had the information. He had to confront her directly and more forcefully than is the norm. Yet even in confrontation, this is what is important – even in the confrontation -- redemption and healing and growth is *always* the goal. Prideful mocking didn't work for the fortune teller, and it will not accomplish spreading God's grace and love through the world...

Oxford professor CS Lewis – heard of him? He is one of those few people who primarily *thought* rather than *felt* his way into his faith of Christ's gracious acceptance of him. He did what was natural and normal in his culture and time period, and publicly explained and defended (expressed his newfound information that he had received) about his personal relationship with God through Christ to millions of people through radio and books. The Oxford hierarchy was embarrassed by him -- and it cost Lewis any opportunity for advancement on the

faculty. Lewis learned that if you speak about beauty, truth, or goodness, and about God as a great generic positive spiritual force, people remain friendly, but when you discuss a personal God who has a definite will and plan for your life and his world, the temperature drops considerably. Yet like Peter, like Paul, like *Lou-ee*) he boldly and as graciously as possible, pressed forward with positive boldness against the resistance of the task and of the people.

In this case, of our Bible text, the resistance ties back to the Philippian business leadership, and their resistance was motivated by how it impacted their wallet more than anything else. They used to say (maybe they still do) the way *to* a man's heart is through his stomach, but if you want to know what is *in* his heart, then look at his checkbook (and I would add calendar) How we use our time and spend our money *MAY* say a great deal about our values and priorities...

What does our use of money and time say about us?

Some of you may have heard me talk about the two dimes before. We are in a time of inflation, so I'll use quarters. Yesterday someone sent me via Facebook post, several gorgeous pictures – one of a beautiful lake that her house overlooks (Torch Lake up by Traverse City). Just a gorgeous view, and then she took two pictures on the other side of her house, which had a large field of blooming daisies everywhere – two breathtaking views, and I know that often in those fields deer are wandering through – they didn't happen to be in those pictures, but – all of that beauty. Now take two quarters and put them in front of your focus points, and how much of that beauty can you see? You lose sight of everything else. Granted, money is important to plan and use wisely. (And we need more of it, by the way). But we must also be aware that all kinds of little things (not necessarily money) – these quarters can represent all kinds of little things -- too much focus on those little things can distort and even block us from seeing, the beauty, the bigger picture, the good things, the proper priorities in our life.



The owners of this fortune teller could not see the wholeness and new life gracefully granted to this woman, all they could only see was – [hold quarters up to eyes again] “We can't get this anymore”. And so they created riots, and then

they falsely blamed Paul and his team for creating the riots they themselves had created. Does that sound like a strategy that is being used today?

They escalated conflict to accomplish their personal agenda. They used powerful emotive words and phrases. In Christian circles, they would be – and maybe I shouldn't say them because you may use them, but – be careful with them – When we state an opinion, but we lead it with “The Lord told me” and especially if we say “The Lord told me to tell you...” How are you supposed to argue with that? Because the implication is that if you argue, you are arguing with the Lord himself... and you want to say, “well, if and when he tells me the same thing he tells you, then I'll agree with you.” And we can use “The Bible says...” that way too – as a way of just ending all argument or even discussion. Full stop, that's it. It's not This is what I think the Bible says, and you may think something differently, it is “What I think it means it what it means period. And all discussion is shut down, because you can't argue against “God” and you can't argue against “the Bible”.

In the case of the Philippians, their unarguable phrase to the city leaders would be along the lines of “Rome is not going to like this”. Philippi was a proud Roman Colony with lots of Roman granted freedoms, and no taxation – as long as they followed the laws of Rome and kept the Roman peace. So to not aggressively against rumors about people who are acting in a way “that Rome would not like” - allegedly – if these leaders didn't act swiftly and decisively, it would make these leaders seem unpatriotic, “un Roman”, and it would be political suicide. Therefore, without any investigation at all, they did not yet realize Paul and Silas were both natural-born Roman citizens - and one of the things Rome hated most was for their citizens to be treated unfairly. But they didn't take the time to find out that they were citizens, and in their blind rush to be patriotic, they did one of the most unpatriotic thing they could do – they stripped and beat Roman citizens without a fair investigation and trial – Rome doesn't like that. They fell into the very thing they were trying to avoid. When they took their eyes “off of the quarters” and saw that they had violated Roman law, and that Rome would not be happy, they were even more terrified than when they were concerned about Paul and Silas causing the riots – but that goes beyond the story we have today – that is at the end of the chapter..... What we have heard happens next. They are thrown in the deepest part of the jail and chained in stocks so that there would be no chance of escape. Now I'll summarize what happens next and throw in some comments as I go through what happens...

Bold Italic font is summary of the Bible text Acts 16:25-34

[comments are in brackets]

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God as the other prisoners listened. [So they were having an Old Time Hymn Sing like we had last week. An early church father commented, “The legs feel nothing in the stocks when the heart is in heaven.” (Tertullian). To which I say, “unh uh (no).” Legs are legs and pain is pain, and it is probably why they were still awake at midnight -- but they managed to overcome it, and instead of the curses and complaints you would normally hear from prisoners in that place, especially ones wrongfully beaten and imprisoned; instead they lift praises and prayers].

Suddenly there was a violent earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison. Prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. The jailer woke up, [it doesn’t say whether the earthquake knocked him out, or whether he had fallen asleep on his watch, or if it wasn’t his shift to be on guard, or but he woke up] **and when he saw the prison doors open, he panicked, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.** [Perhaps out of honor as a Roman soldier failing to guard correctly, or perhaps as a self-imposed act of mercy compared to what his superiors would do to him for allowing the escape. I didn’t tell you this in the earlier reading, but if you go on a couple more verses, it says that after they could not find Peter, Herod cross-examined the 16 soldiers assigned to guard him, and then he had them all executed, and I’m sure it wasn’t done mercifully either. I often wonder why Paul did not think the earthquake that loosed his chains and opened the prison doors was not a sign to take his freedom and leave the jail. In Peter’s case with the angel, it was obvious what to do. The angel practically took him by the hand and led him. I would have thought this earthquake would also have been a very clear sign, “Hey, God’s letting us out, let’s go!” But Paul didn’t see it that way, for reasons that are not stated and that I don’t know. He may have been thinking of a divinely led human strategy – Paul’s long-term strategy was to be heard in trial before Caesar, and if you are going to be heard in a trial before Caesar, you have to stay in jail and be a prisoner. before the leaders of the land – for that he would have to remain a prisoner – but that divinely given strategy may have happened later -- and in fact he did eventually demand to go to Rome and make an appeal Caesar. (See Acts 25:12, 26:13), But in this shorter term, and in this Pentecost season, I suspect they were simply leaning on the nudges of the Spirit to stay. It is very important in all circumstances, to be sensitive to the checks

and nudges of Spirit]. Sometimes, the obvious thing is not - the obvious thing. We have to be careful in the way we walk with God.

[And now from the inner darkness of that cell, we imagine the prisoners could see a silhouette of the guard in the moonlight outside the outer prison doors and could tell what he was about to do – to harm himself, and so] **Paul yells for him to stop because they were all there.** [Perhaps it was their positive, magnetic, powerful personalities that convinced the other prisoners to remain in place].

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas, brought them out and asked, “What must I do to be saved?” [As a Roman officer in Philippi, he was probably well up to date on the news in the city. He was likely aware of his prisoner’s charges, and of the claims expressed by the fortune teller, (that they had a message of salvation), and of the exorcism, and now the earthquake -- the jailer had heard and felt and seen enough to be convinced that these men were divine messengers and asked how he could find God’s salvation also...

Paul and Silas explained what Jesus had done for us and to believe Jesus was Lord (to put our trust in him and commit ourselves to following his way of life). He did, with his household, and Christianity made more inroads into Europe. Like Lydia two weeks ago, the jailer took them home and fed them. He also washed their wounds, and joy came to his house. [End of story.]

Now we are going to lay three stories side by side because that is where they are in Acts 16 –

Grace comes in various forms

right in a row --- we see Luke trying to show that God’s far-reaching grace can take many shapes and forms. From the undramatic routine of Lydia who only needed the right information -- she was already seeking to find, and when Paul came she found the Christ she was already seeking; to a crisis tipping point in the life of the fortune teller who wanted to be very confrontational – maybe that was a disguised cry for help, who knows? – but however it worked, it came to a tipping point where she was healed and made whole, --- to God’s miraculous actions that led to the salvation of the jailer and his loved ones... are just three examples of ways grace may come to us: in the routine, in the crisis, in miraculous happenings.

If we went around this room and we all told our own stories, I suspect some of us would relate something routine, or some life crisis, or some miracle in their life that brought them to this place or into God’s grace. And it may fit into a completely different category – for these are just three examples of many means... we all have

our own stories, it all happens different ways for each of us. It doesn't matter the style of experience.

What I have noticed over time, and through the history that I have read, that God frequently makes his salvation known

God often works his grace through people – but it is God who does it (See Ephesians 2:3-5, 8-10)

and available through his people who are following him. He makes us be a part of it. He doesn't HAVE to, but almost always, hmmm – let's put it this way **often, often** it is true that people are involved. But we must also remember that it is God who does it, not us. We don't create earthquakes on demand, at least most of us don't. We can't in our own strength bring healing and wholeness to a person, and in fact, even the do-able "routine teaching" will have no impact unless God is working in the message, and on the speaker and in the listener, moving hearts to receptiveness. As important as the role is that God has called on his people to perform, true salvation is always God's miracle of grace and not the result of human effort. A transformed life is something only God can do.

Despite the type of experience, the real miracle is that while we all deserve death for our sins; God in Jesus Christ said, "I love you" and "I will take your place, and I will die for you - so that you can live forever with Me."

Prayer Let's pray. Lord, help us to realize that as we serve you, it is always your work that precedes us, works around us, works through us; and it is you who brings salvation and growth to each of us. Lord we thank you that you accepted us even while we were yet sinners, that you unlocked the doors of our heart and freed us from what imprisoned us, and those things that continue to try and imprison us yet again. Yet the light of your amazing love continues to show its life to us – it does not matter what we may face in our future, because you are there with us, standing by us all the way. And it is in the name of Jesus that we give our thanks for this. Amen.

Music Paul and Silas dug deep and found spiritual joy in the midst of physical imprisonment. In whatever circumstances we may find ourselves, may we too can experience God's spiritual deliverance from whatever attempts to imprison us, tie us down, or hold us back. Let's stand and sing of his amazing love for us.

And Can it Be? (vv 1,3,4)

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood!
Died he for me? who caused his pain! For me? who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me? *

He left his Father's throne above - so free, so infinite his grace!-,
emptied himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free, for O my God, it found out me! *

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray; I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee.*

* This whole line is repeated

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Blessing Now may God, whose love -- like rolling waves -- is never ceasing --
always refreshing -- bathe you as in clear, calm, living streams of water. May his
gracious forgiveness fall over you -- so that the borders of failure, of opposition, of
racial and religious heritage, of incompatible world views, of national ancestry, or
of the lack of or misuse of knowledge -- may be washed away and you are renewed
in the tides of his mercy. **Amen.**