

Waiting, whilst others watch!

Acts 16¹⁶⁻³⁴; Psalm 97; Revelation 22^{12-13,16-17,20-end}; John 17^{20-end}

About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. [Acts 16²⁵]

If you had just been publicly abused, stripped of your clothes, beaten with sticks, thrown into a dark prison and had your feet fixed to the floor in stocks, what would you feel like singing? Acts records that Paul and Silas **were praying and singing hymns to God and that the prisoners were listening to them.**

One thing you can be sure of, is that those around us who are not Christians – family and friends – do notice how we respond to the things that happen to us: the consistency and integrity of our witness matters.

So what would Paul and Silas, in their situation, sing that would positively influence others?

Traditionally, people have just accepted that Paul and Silas would be singing cheerful songs – O, Happy Day, Jubilate, or whatever – but that seems to me to be dishonest.

There is a great tradition in the Psalms of expressing your misery to God and asking God to change things – that seems more likely to me!

When God responds it is impressive – **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.** But no-one made a run for it! The jailer assumed that they would and so **he drew his sword and was about to kill himself** (to save his bosses the bother of doing it). This wasn't what anyone would have expected and it became clear that God was in it.

The question obviously comes from observing what had been happening and Paul and Silas themselves – **What must I do to be saved?** The answer is that wonderfully concise statement of the Gospel: **believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household.**

Baptism followed immediately for the whole household and the rest is history!

How do we respond when life falls apart for us? What does that response say about God and our faith? If we fall apart and despair that is as futile as being dishonestly cheerful.

It is OK to grieve if someone dies; it is OK to show weakness in the face of uncertainty; it is OK to be disappointed when plans collapse.

Alongside that it is OK to be certain that God knows what he is doing, even if we don't; it is OK to have confidence that God will provide the strength we need in and for every situation; it is OK to have the faith that God in his grace will never let us down.

Those watching us don't need to see that we are coping, they need to see that God makes a difference to us; they don't need to see our strength, they need to see that in our weakness we know that God holds us; they don't need to see that we have all the answers, but that we are honest with God about the questions we have.

In these days between the Ascension and Pentecost the Church waits for the renewal of the Holy Spirit as we come to celebrate Pentecost – even the Apostles didn't do anything before they were empowered to do it. Until God unlocked the door of the Upper Room, they were hiding behind it!

Paul and Silas didn't have much option, secured as they were in their prison, but they too waited for God to make the difference whilst making it clear to their listeners that they were still in touch with God.

We, too, wait and in that dependence on God we witness to his power to transform our lives.