



Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Southwestern MN Synod Sermon Series Mission Statement *Summer 2022*

+ Sermon by Director for Evangelical Mission Rev. Troy Pflibsen

“The Risen Christ surprises us with opportunities to plant God’s Word in the world.”

Acts 16:25-34

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” ²⁹ The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them outside and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³² They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. ³⁴ He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

Today we return to a story we heard earlier this spring.

Paul and Silas are imprisoned because they had cast out a demon from a slave girl.

Normally folks might consider casting out a demon a good thing. But in this case the demon helped her to tell the future and her owners had exploited this and sold her services. Hence, from their perspective, it was not a good thing that Paul and Silas cast out the demon. They had Paul and Silas thrown into jail.

And in the ancient world, once someone was thrown into a jail their future was uncertain. There was not much justice in their justice system.

So Paul and Silas were in prison, trying to make the best of a bad situation.

Paul did have some options, but he had yet to exercise them.

In this seemingly awful moment, the Spirit works something amazing.

First, there is a miraculous earthquake that frees all the prisoners. This is a big deal in itself!

But the Spirit does more. The Spirit opens the jailer's heart, and the jailer asks to hear the Jesus story. The jailer wants to know what he needs to do to be saved.

Can you picture the moment?

One minute Paul and Silas are just trying to stay alive in an awful prison.

The next minute, the jailer, the one who had made their lives miserable asks them about Jesus.

And this is just one of many such stories of a surprise witness in the Bible.

Paul and Timothy with Lydia and her household. We heard this story back in May.

Literally, there were many twists and turns in the journey before Paul and Timothy came to Lydia.

Peter with the centurion Cornelius and his household.

A Jew reaching out to a Gentile and his family.

We may not experience quite the same drama as in these stories.

But sometimes invitations to tell the Jesus' story do catch us off guard!

The conversation with the neighbor turns from yardwork to Jesus.

The grocery story, aisle and an acquaintance asks a question regarding spirituality.

The restaurant, your conversation is overheard, and they want to know about your faith.

It's not just in the Bible that these moments come.

The Spirit still opens hearts and puts believers like you and me in the path of those who have questions, those who want to hear the story of Jesus.

A surprising story of sharing of the faith for Paul and Silas.

The Spirit still brings these moments today!

Amen.