

Sunday 24th May 2020

Sermon by Brian Jones

Readings Acts 16: 16 – 36 and John 17: 20 -26

Good Morning and I trust that you are all well. Let us pray; Thank you Lord for the sacrifice your Son made for each of us. May His words and acts inspire us and teach us this day, and in the days to come. Amen.

Sometimes you get two Biblical Texts or readings which do not appear to have any obvious connection. When I read these texts I did not immediately see that connection, but rest assured you're still going to get a sermon! Slowly, very slowly I must admit, a connection began to dawn on me and Andrea's very good sermon last Sunday fixed that connection for me. In her sermon she talked about home and challenged us to find words that go with home. One that came to me was the word 'family', a family home, a phrase much used by estate agents when describing homes for sale. So, your challenge for this week is: How many times is the word family mentioned in the Bible? It is only mentioned 13 times which surprised me.

In both the readings today this word family comes across to me, being much more obvious in the reading from Acts but still very much there in the reading from John.

So, let's examine the reading from Acts first. Paul and Silas encountered a slave girl who claimed to predict the future or know what was going to happen, a practice very common in the Roman world at that time, for money of course. As an aside but relevant it does remind me of the news now as the news channels and papers always seem to be able to role out an expert with a view as to how the pandemic and everything associated with it will pan out; I think it was George Bernard Shaw who said 'Save me from experts.' However, back to Acts. **VERSE 17: The girl followed Paul and the rest shouting 'These men are servants of the most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.'**

This troubled Paul, not the message or its content I am sure but I think for his concern for the girl, so he turned one day, as we are told in verse 16, and commanded the spirit to leave her.

Naturally the girl's owners weren't pleased and they had Paul and Silas arrested and thrown into prison and chained, with the jailer told to keep a close eye on them. What did Paul and Silas do? They prayed and sang hymns which the other prisoners listened to. Then an earthquake and all the doors of the prison were thrown open and all the prisoners chains undone. When the jailer saw this, he went to kill himself as he thought they had all escaped but Paul shouted 'don't harm yourself, we're all here.' The jailer asked what he must do to be saved to which Paul and Silas replied '**BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS AND YOU WILL BE SAVED – YOU AND YOUR FAMILY.**' The jailer took them home and he and his family were baptised and they believed in God and were filled with joy. Family, a whole family, converted to God and saved just as we and our families are.

The first time I spoke on this text was at a Service in Rochester prison and to a man all the prisoners and some officers said they would have done a runner if the doors were open. I did, of course, explain what the meaning of the text was; that God and His Son Jesus Christ can save them and release them from their chains or past lives through prayer. This is the same for us all and anyone else that perhaps we can help to find God and a new life through Jesus, just as the jailer and his family did and like them become part of Gods family.

In the reading from John Jesus prays not only for His disciples and followers at the time, He is praying for you and me in this world today. **VERSE 20 'MY PRAYER IS NOT FOR THEM ALONE. I PRAY ALSO FOR THOSE WHO WILL BELIEVE IN ME THROUGH THEIR MESSAGE.'** Andrea mentioned Pentecost in her sermon last Sunday and it's at Pentecost the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus, comes to touch the disciples and you and me and all who turn to God through Jesus Christ. We live in the world as part of the Christian family but we are not of the world. God wants us to be involved in the world and change it for the better without being corrupted by the world and its attitudes. The world hates good people in general; why, because they show up their own and the world's wickedness. As part of Gods family, it is our role to combat that wickedness and bring people by our words and actions into Gods family. In John 17:15 Jesus prays for our protection from the evil one and not to take us out of the world but to be a part of it. We are charged to do Gods work as taught by Jesus and guided and

protected by the Holy Spirit. So as part of Gods family we must show Him in all we do and say.

I want to finish with the Prayer of Richard, Bishop of Chichester in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, it is on the sermon on the Parish website, please use it in your daily prayer.

Let us pray ‘Thanks be to you Lord Jesus Christ for the cruel pains and insults you have borne for me. For the many blessings you have won for me. Holy Jesus, most merciful redeemer, friend and brother may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly day by day. Amen.