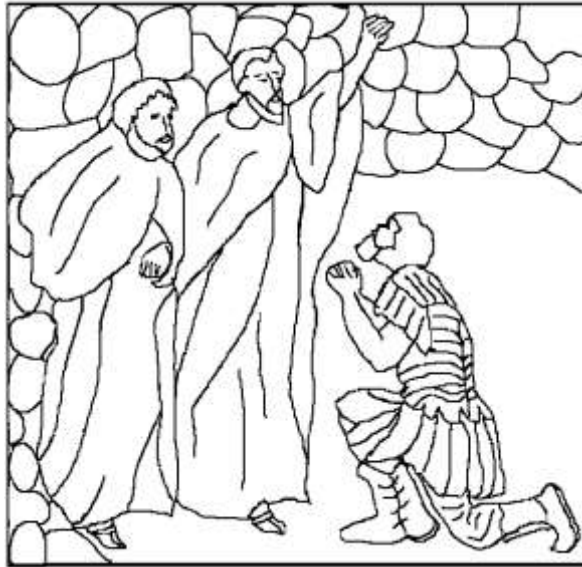


# WELCOME TO...

## The Presbyterian Church of Saint David May 12, 2013



### The acts of the early church

With the death and resurrection of Jesus, the early church formed around the apostles now filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and began a ministry which continues to this day. As we follow the early church we find our own foundation and the basis of our faith.

*The Spirit is coming to bless us all with a new song: **Let our joy be complete!** Gifts for the good of all, poured out on all to teach us a new song: **Love one another!** Strangers and neighbors, foreigners and family will join in the new song: **No longer servants but friends!** Come, let our worship make a joyful noise, **Rejoicing in the friendship of God.***

Hymn: Let us praise (x2)

40

Prayer of Confession: *Too often, Lord God, we are hesitant in our proclamation; seeking safe and suitable opportunities to speak of our faith.*

**Too often, Lord God, we are half-hearted in our service; reluctant to stand out from the crowd or to attract criticism.**

*Too often, Lord God, we live as if dependent wholly on our own resources; relying on our perceived skills and modest insights.*

**Too often, Lord God, we look to the clouds for our inspiration, in the vain hope of finding you there.**

*Forgive the poverty of our efforts and the frailty of our faith and open wide our hearts and minds to the immanent presence of our Risen, Living and Ascended Lord Jesus Christ. In his name we pray and say together: **Our Father ...***

Assurance of Pardon: *Sisters and brothers, God is at work in us and with us! The glory that God has manifested in Jesus Christ is given to us even now so that we may live and love as one, for in Christ, we are one.*

Hymn: Silence! Frenzied, unclean spirit

729

Scripture: **Acts 16:16-34** One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and

singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 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. 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. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. 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.

Will Willimon's Interpretation commentary on Acts 16:11-40 (pp. 136-41). It's a tightly woven piece—almost a sermon in itself—on who is free and who is enslaved in the interlocking stories of Acts 16. Thanks to Paul's annoyance and the power of the name of Jesus, the slave girl who was caught in the grip of demon possession becomes free, "Yet no, she is not free. She is a *slave*, someone who is not a person but a piece of property" (139). Are her "free" owners free enough to rejoice in her healing? No way. They respond to the slave girl's freedom by engineering a lock-up for the apostles. Later, when Paul, Silas and the others are beaten, bloody, locked in the innermost cell of the jail and shackled besides, they are strangely free to sing. Is the jailer free? Not after the chains come off, at which point he decides that suicide will be the least objectionable way to die if his prisoners have escaped. "Having a key to someone else's cell does not make you free" (140). "By the end of the story," Willimon concludes, "everyone who at first appeared to be free—the girl's owners, the judges, the jailer—is a slave. And everyone who first appeared to be enslaved—the poor girl, Paul, and Silas—is free" (140). There is certainly more going on in this story than just the contrast between freedom and enslavement, yet the contrast is a good way into the story and a very good angle for a sermon.

Hymn: I come with joy (1-3)

**530**

### **Invitation:**

*People of "the Way" modelled a new way for the world, inviting to sit at table rich and poor, slave and free, female and male, gentile and Jew. All knew themselves to be at table because of the gracious invitation of Jesus. **We are invited to share in the joyful feast of the people of God. At this table we come together as the guests of Jesus.***

Prayer of Thanksgiving: *The Lord is here. **God's spirit is with us. Lift up your hearts. We lift them to the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right to give thanks and praise.***

(Continue in thanksgiving) *O God, giver of all that is good,*

**Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. May they be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other**

### **Communion**

**Prayer after Communion**      *Through your Spirit we offer ourselves in discipleship.*

**We stand together as your disciples.**

**We seek renewed and renewing faith.**

**Touch us now with your Spirit, Lord.**

**Touch us now with your Spirit.**

Hymn: I come with joy (4-5)

**530**

What liberates us from those things that imprison us is faith. Feelings of being fenced in, trapped or locked up, can be overcome when we are passionate about what we believe. Physical confinement doesn't prevent us from using our minds and being creative. Also, we can escape the walls that surround us by focusing on the needs of others rather than constantly worrying about ourselves. And, we can also be assured that God is aware of our bondage and through means beyond our control, is just waiting to set us free.      Copyright 2004, Keith Wagner.