

**Sermon at St. Andrew's Church  
May 30, 2022 – 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter ( C )  
by the Rev. Connie Jones**

*Acts 16:16-34*

One of my handful of completely unmarketable skills is writing chancel dramas.  
That is, scripts for acting out dramatic Bible stories,  
in church, or in Vacation Bible School.

The high point of my career so far  
was staging the finding of baby Moses in a basket, in the bull rushes –  
not of the Nile River, but of the decorative fountain in front of the church.  
There was a real live baby as Moses,  
and his Mom played Pharaoh's daughter, who discovered him.

So.....my fingers on the keyboard are just *itching* to dramatize Silas and Paul's jailbreak,  
when an earthquake rattled loose the lock on their prison cell.

They'd been up late singing and praying,  
not deterred at all in the preaching that had gotten them arrested in the first place,  
and when the rumble came, the door popped open.

When the jailer showed up, he was sure his prisoners had escaped.

He panicked!

"The boss will kill me for this!" he thought. "I'll kill myself now instead!"

You just heard how the story ends.

Paul and Silas tell him all is well,  
and then the man.....well..... asks to join up with whatever he just saw happen.  
He invites the guys to his house, they baptize everybody in his family,  
and then they sit down to dinner.

**The Bible is chock-full** of amazing stories of miracles,  
divine interventions, crazy twists and turns to stories of life-as-usual,  
or maybe life going to hell in a handbasket,  
*when God flips the script.*

There are so many of these stories, in fact,  
that really, we ought to *expect* God's intervention  
instead of being surprised by it every time,  
as if we were only beginning to realize that *this is who God really is.*

**A couple of weeks ago**, the Women of the Way book-reading group

squeezed into the Rohrs living room,  
 and Andie opened the discussion by asking each of us to describe  
 a time when God showed up directly in our life.  
 It took an hour. Some tears were shed,  
 but each person did indeed have a story to share.  
 No earthquakes or jail-breaks,  
 but some moments of profound experiences of the Holy.  
 Events as small as the change in the quality of light around a tree or a face.  
 Things no outsider would ever have noticed,  
 yet *at that instant*, unmistakable signs of God's presence.  
 Signs that would never, ever be forgotten.

This happens so often in the Bible, and honestly, so often in real life,  
 it's surprising that we don't expect miracles all the time.  
 Surprising we don't expect jail-breaks all the time,  
 from one stuck situation after another.  
 God does behave this way!

**So.....where** is *our* script stuck?

The answer is different for each of us,  
 but together, surely we'd start with our horror and grief and anger  
 at the slaughter of little children and teachers in Texas,  
 and our sense of complete helplessness  
 to prevent angry, broken young men with assault weapons from committing mass murder.  
 Add what seems to need a miracle to affect, *these* horrors –  
 the evil ravaging of a whole country by Vladimir Putin,  
 the accelerating ruination of the environment,  
 widening gaps between rich and poor,  
 injustice and radical inequity for black and brown people and immigrants,  
 and the shocking paralysis and downright iniquity of our political system  
 as all these wicked situations pile up like uncollected garbage.

**So, in our regular prayers** we pray for peace, and safety,  
 and for justice and the love of God to prevail – to *break into* our world.

We pray like Paul and Silas,

and maybe we sing a little bit with them too.

We should probably also keep watch for an earthquake –  
 not a literal one maybe, but a shift in the balance of things.

A fresh idea or a brilliant leader or a compromise-broker,  
 with a heart of gold and exactly the right formula for getting things done.

**You and I can't make** miracles happen.

The Holy Spirit blows as it wishes.

But we can learn to recognize a miracle when we see one.

It'll accord with the goodness of God that is planted in us.

We can also *pray* for a miracle.

Keep our eyes open and then name it when we see it.

I suspect it'll always be a surprise; seem like it's impossible when it comes.

It might be an unexpected instance of racial justice, a wronged prisoner set free,  
or a person in power found guilty in court.

It could be your best friend finally agreeing to go into rehab,  
or a win-win idea for turning the tide on controlling death by firearms.

An unimagined turn of events in Russian leadership,  
or something you say that begins the reconciliation  
of family members who haven't spoken to each other in years.

Above all, you can be in top shape to act,

to participate in accomplishing goodness when the Spirit moves.

Remember the 5,000 people on a hill, listening to Jesus preach?

And the disciples said, Lord, they're hungry and there are no grocery stores near by?

And Jesus said, *you* give them something to eat.

So they rustled up a little boy with a bag of bread and fish,

then Jesus *took it and blessed it and broke it* and **there was enough**.

God needs the disciples, and the boy with his bag lunch, and you and me,  
to bless so goodness can come about.

We should be ready to pull up our socks,

stop whining and quarreling, muster our resources, and give it a try.

Maybe praying all the while, Lord, Prosper the work of our hands.

Old, or weak, or poor as we are, God needs us.

God will bless whatever we've brought with us in our sack,  
then multiply it into a miracle.

And then, when the amazing thing happens,

maybe just even a tiny fragment of holy amazingness,  
we'll do what Paul and Silas did.

Baptize and celebrate what's new by proclaiming it, singing about it,  
and going on to do the next good thing.

But first, sit down and have a good meal together.

Which, I think, is what you and I will do, right now.