

Disruptive Information
Acts 16:16-34
June 2, 2019
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In our scripture passage today, a lot of lives are disrupted.

A slave girl: she is healed.

The owners of the slave girl: they may have to go out of business because she was a big source of income for them.

Paul and Silas: they are severely beaten for healing the slave girl and then thrown into prison.

The jailor: He was commanded to watch Paul and Silas carefully. His life is disrupted when it appears his prisoners can escape after an earthquake.

This is chaos happening in a short amount of time. And the jailor runs out and says something close to, "How do I get out of this mess?!"

Our lives are disrupted...frequently. Look back over your lives (perhaps just this past year!) and see the times when the disruptions came. The dreaded phone call in the middle of the night. A beloved pet passes away. A diagnosis of cancer. A move to assisted living. My Dad at the age of 95 just gave up his car keys. "I've lost my independence," he said. "I've been driving for over 70 years."

And today, we say good-bye to a beloved person in the office, Gay, the voice you hear when you call the office, or the first person you see when you walk into the office. This is a disruption.

Of course, not all disruptions are negative. A friend of mine just became a grandmother. A person wins the lottery. Someone gets a new puppy. Moving into a new home. All disruptions, but awesome.

How do you handle disruptions in your life? Are you good at it? Or, does it just take you down, or throw you for a loop? Let's take a look at how the people in our scripture passage handled their disruptions, and what we can learn from them.

The slave girl: Unfortunately, we can't learn much from her, because we never find out how she responded to being healed of the spirit that allowed her to predict the future. Once she is healed, we never hear from her again.

The owners of the slave girl: they face a disruption in their livelihood. How do they handle it? They lash out in anger by having Paul and Silas arrested. They get the crowd on their side, and insist that Paul and Silas pay for what they did. Paul and Silas are severely beaten and thrown into jail.

Maybe you know people when life doesn't go the way they planned, they lash out in anger at those around them, causing others pain as well. We witnessed it again (in an extreme, but all too common example) as another shooter kills 12 people at a workplace in Virginia Beach.

The jailor: when he finds out that the prisoners can escape after the earthquake, he can't bear the thought of failing at his job, and in a rash decision decides to take his own life. Fortunately, Paul and Silas are able to stop him. They give one of the most effective treatments for depression: "We are still here," they say. This makes all the difference to those who find life too disruptive. "I'm still here. You are not alone."

Maybe you know some people who self-destruct when their lives are disrupted, and it is your job to call them off the edge. "I am still here. You are not alone."

Something even more significant happens in this passage. There are lives that are disrupted by Jesus. Paul and Silas are used to their lives being disrupted by Jesus. This isn't the first time they have been threatened by a crowd. But this disruption is painful, literally, as they are beaten. But what do they do? With their feet in shackles, Paul and Silas break out in prayer and song while in prison.

(Maybe one way to look at this is with a bit of humor. Take a look at the picture on the front of the bulletin. Did you notice? It is the humor of Carla in the office who puts together our bulletins. Paul and Silas are taking a "selfie" in prison.)
Moving on....

They could have felt sorry for themselves in jail and in pain. They could have complained and cursed the town they were in, even cursed God. Instead, they praise and worship God while everyone in jail is listening.

When life fills you with disruptions, can you still praise God? Know that people are watching your response. And how you respond can be a witness for Christ.

Which leads us back to the jailer. His life is now disrupted by Jesus. How? Paul and Silas do not run away after the earthquake when finding themselves free. Instead Paul and Silas take the opportunity to be the voice and the hands of Christ. They call the jailer to faith in Christ, and his life is disrupted forever. And not just the jailer, but his whole household is disrupted by Christ. The jailer bathes the wounds of Paul and Silas, feeds them a meal, and does it all with joy.

What Jesus taught the jailer is that he was loved and valued not for what he did (keeping prisoners in jail) but simply for who he is....a child of God. This can be disruptive news to some people.

Last week, I was on study leave. I didn't go anywhere; I stayed home, read spiritual books, journeled, prayed, listened to God. One of the books I read was called *The Making of Us: Who we can become when life doesn't go as planned*. In other words, when our lives are disrupted.

The author, Sheridan Voysey and his wife, tried for years to have a child. It was the greatest desire of his wife. Something to fulfill her. Sheridan already had a great job that fulfilled him. But that child never came.

Eventually his wife was offered her dream job in another part of the country. In order to take this job, they had to move, and Sheridan would have to give up his dream job. But to bring happiness to his wife, Sheridan gave it up for her.

He now found himself trying to figure out what to do with his life. Who was he now after this disruption? He decided to go on a pilgrimage – a 100 mile walk along the Northeast coast of England. He began his journey with this “deep” prayer: Lead me, Lord. Lead me. That prayer eventually turned into: Speak, Lord, speak. Which turned into: Teach me, Lord. Teach me.

Aren’t these prayers we can pray when life is disruptive?

This is what God taught him: “Your first calling in life is to be with God. Beautiful things can emerge from life not going as planned. It can even be the making of us.”

If life disrupts, you can still become who you are meant to be. You are a child of God. And you are even something more than that. Jesus said you are my friends. We have the high and holy identity of friend with Christ.

This week, Linda Freeman and I are offering a class on how to express your faith in words. We are going to help you write your own statement of faith. In his book Sheridan writes his own statement of faith. He begins this way:

The hands that spin the galaxies brought me into being.
The one who holds the stars has made me his own.
I am God’s child. My life is rich, my days are sacred.
I have meaning and value.
Even when the shadows fall.

I am a pilgrim in this world, in search of wisdom and wonder.
I will take new adventures.
I will follow God into the unknown.
I will listen for God’s whisper.
Knowing wrong turns will come.
And that even then, I am still in God’s hands.

As we prepare to sing the next hymn, it is a hard song to sing. We have song it several times, but if you can't get the tune, pay attention to the words. It is a song about dungeons, our chains falling off, and rising to follow the One who loves us. Know that as you face disruptions this week, that you are a child of God and how you respond, you can be a witness for Christ. Please stand as we sing "And Can it Be."