

SERMON – “Foundations Shaken” – May 16, 2010  
Text: Acts 16:19-34

During the Nisqually earthquake of 2001 a member, Marty McCutcheon, was here in the sanctuary. When she felt the earthquake she looked up and found that the building was indeed rocking, rolling, and swaying but the cross was perfectly still. I think this is a great image of what it is like when God appears on the scene the foundations of our lives, our culture, and our society are shaken. Yet in the middle of it all there is Jesus Christ offering steadiness, strength, and calm. Usually when foundations are shaken something is realized. In earthquakes it is energy, for humans it is freedom and then there is joy.

Our Acts text reports such an incident. There is a slave girl that is imprisoned by a spirit that gives her the gift of fortune telling. But she is also imprisoned in slavery. Her masters use her to make their fortune. This spirit can't seem to leave Paul and his ministry team alone. The girl follows them around yelling; “You are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” Maybe she can't leave them alone because she intuitively knows they possess the power to release her from slavery to humans and from

the unwanted spirit. Out of the spirit of frustration Paul frees her from this spirit.

However, in this case one person's freedom is another person's trouble. Her owners were angry because Paul took away their source of income. Paul and Silas were brought up in a kind of kangaroo court, found guilty, stripped from their clothing, beaten with rods, and thrown into jail. Yet, in the midst of their imprisonment they sang hymns and prayed. There was a calm in the midst of great harm and hardship.

Then hits an earthquake. The foundation of the prison is shaken, another opportunity for liberation. But the prisoners stay. They choose not to escape. Next we meet the jailer. The jailer is filled with fear of God, for in ancient civilization earthquakes were the sign of the presence of God, in Roman culture the great Zeus, in Jewish/ Christian culture it was the Almighty God. The power of God would of shaken the foundations of not only the prison but the foundations of all of creation.

The jailer knew it was a great power. He knew he was about to be punished for the prisoners escape. So he was resorting to suicide. Just as he was about to kill himself Paul urges him not to. They tell

the guard of the message of Jesus Christ. He believes. Takes the prisoners to his home and washes their wounds and then he and his family are baptized. The core of this man's foundation was shook and in that he was able to find the calm and joy, Jesus Christ, in the midst of the shaking.

To reflect on these two stories, I would like you to ponder two questions. There will be silence after each question to reflect on God's Word for you today.

The first question: What imprisons or restricts your life, or the life of others that prevents you/them being what God created you/them to be? (worry about money and things, fear of failure, fear of the future, lack of self esteem, what others think of you, a past hurt and residue anger that just doesn't seem to leave, endless grief, and a social injustice that keeps others in their poverty.) Please use the worship notes area of bulletin to write down your reflections.

Give 1-2 minutes to reflect

Second question: What foundation does God need to shake up in order for lives to be freed from imprisonment. (a dysfunctional family system, what I thought I believed in, who I thought I was, or what society tell us we can be and do. Or possibly the greed of a

capitalistic society that keeps the rich getting richer while more and more people slip into poverty.)

Give 2 minutes to reflect

I am here to proclaim to you that God does break in systems, attitudes, false beliefs and perceptions, and even society biases and liberates. I can tell you that I would not be here as a woman pastor if God did not shake up the foundations of ancient patriarchy in Christianity. I can tell you that Christ church today would not be in existence if Jesus Christ did not burst in unexpectedly and change lives. I can tell you that the faith community, the church, will stay by people whose foundations are shaken and provide the Lord's peace that resides in them. Remember Jesus' mission was to proclaim release to the captives.

When we are liberated we know the presence of Christ in the midst of a shake down. When we are liberated we are the empowered to live differently to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbors as ourselves. When liberated we can welcome all in God's kingdom including our enemies.

When God is shaking up the foundations of our lives all we have to do is look up at the cross then you will find calm and hope. I am going to close with words from an African American Spiritual that expresses the results of God's earth shaken presence.

Free at last,

Free at last,

Thank God I'm free at last.