

Unexpected Ministry, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. x7070520
Acts 16:16-34 and Luke 24:44-53
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Opportunities for unexpected ministry face us every day of our lives. You stop at the light at the exit from the interstate and there is a man claiming to be homeless and needing money. Do you reach into your wallet and hand him a dollar bill, or do you say to yourself, "He's only going to use the money to buy alcohol or drugs, and I don't want to feed his habit."? Our fast-paced schedules don't leave us time to sit down with such a person to hear his story, much less to find out the facts of his story.

Perhaps as Christians we ought to be asking ourselves, why there are homeless people in our culture? Could it be that our legislators have decided we don't have enough public money to care for the mentally disabled and we leave them to fend for themselves and they end up on the street? Could it be that because of the high cost of medical care, a person could not keep her home, and has ended up living on the street? What happens when faith confronts power? When does God call us to bring freedom and compassion? These are questions of unexpected ministry.

Paul and Silas ended up in prison because they responded with an unexpected ministry. They did not take the time to hear a girl's story, they just acted. They rid a slave girl of a spirit. This is a very curious event, as we look more closely. This slave girl was following Paul and Silas around saying, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." It sounds to me as though this spirit was not evil; it was not a demon. In fact, the spirit within the slave girl was actually preaching the gospel: "[They] proclaim to you a way of salvation!"

What did Paul and Silas find offensive? The only thing I can figure is that the young woman was owned by others. She was a source of profit for the owners. These were powers of exploitation. This is the story of the confrontation between the powers that exploit human life and those that bring deliverance. Confronting the powers of exploitation can be costly.

We don't really hear any more about this slave girl. We don't know if she was cast aside by her owners as worthless, whether she continued in their service, or whether she joined the church in Philippi. We do know what happened to Paul and Silas. The slave girl's owners were furious! They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them before the magistrates, accusing them of un-capitalistic behavior and advocating customs that were not Roman. I take that to mean that it was customary in Rome to own and profit by other people.

To own and profit by other people has taken place in other cultures, and even by people who called themselves Christian. To own and profit by other people is counter to the ways of God and to the freedom of the Gospel. There is more slavery today than there was at the time of the civil war. "Women from eastern Europe are bonded into prostitution, children are trafficked between West African countries and men are forced to work as slaves on Brazilian agricultural estates."¹

Paul and Silas paid the price of confronting the powers of exploitation with the Gospel of God's love. They were thrown into jail. They were thrown into the deepest darkest recesses of the jail and slapped into stocks. Unexpected ministry can have unexpected results, dangerous to one's health! But at this point, more curious things occur!

Paul and Silas prayed and sang songs, and got other prisoners to listen and sing also. The

¹<http://www.antislavery.org/homepage/antislavery/modern.htm>

account says they were making loud noises at midnight! It sounds like nighttime on a college campus! Think of way they were able to brighten lives of the others who were imprisoned! They were carrying out another unexpected ministry!

All of a sudden, there was an Earthquake. It broke their chains and opened the door of the prison. Paul and Silas could have escaped, but they didn't run. Why? They could have been free!

They did not run away from the responsibility of their actions. Every action has wider ramifications. Their escape would have meant death for the Jailer. The magistrates, the oppressive powers would have had him killed for losing his prisoners. You heard his terror: he was ready to kill himself with his own sword. Paul and Silas talked him out of it. They once again performed an unexpected ministry.

Paul felt responsible for the jailer and his family. The consequences of our actions are always greater than we think. If we simply serve ourselves, then we miss what effect we may have on others. A Christian watches out for number two! Because Paul and Silas didn't run, they had an opportunity to demonstrate the Christian faith to the jailer and his family. Upon hearing gospel, the jailer and his family became believers. The jailer and his family rejoiced because they believed in God.

The jailer invited Paul and Silas to sit down and have a meal together. They were now members of family of faith. The irony is that the jailer invited Paul and Silas to eat at his family table, and now he was a part of the Christian family!

We are confronted every day with unexpected opportunities for ministry. Some of them will get us into trouble with the powers of oppression. But all of them will lead others to an understanding of the Gospel of God's love as shown to us by Jesus.