

June 2, 2019

Acts 16: 16-34

Prayer: Dear God, We long to be active participants in your Word. Help us to throw those rocks to create whatever ripples you want us to make. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

The Ripple Effect

I'm a big believer in the ripple effect. When people visit us to see if there are things they might adapt, they always ask, *How did you get nurses here?*

How did you get attorneys?

How did you get an ophthalmologist?

I answer, *We didn't. Bon Secours called and asked if they could send a nurse and medical social worker.*

Attorneys Chip Price and David Rutledge and Legal Aid's Debra Scurry said, "We'll come over every Wednesday and see what we can do."

Dr. Darrell Jervey dropped by and said, "Let's try some eye screenings and see what happens."

And so I always tell visitors, "When people see you doing good work, they will break down your door to join you."

That's the case with the Upstate Woman's Club of Simpsonville who raised over \$19,000 at our April art auction.

And that's the case with a young man named Curtiss Veal. Curtiss came to us last winter, wanting to hold a BrewRuck. He had to explain it.

“To ruck” is a verb, meaning to carry something in a rucksack or backpack. It is how our Special Forces train.

A young Special Forces soldier founded the company GoRuck when he returned from his service in Iraq. He began making backpacks tough enough for military training. But ultimately he began marketing them for very demanding civilian events in which people would walk for miles with bricks in those backpacks.

Well, some participants in Charlotte found a way to combine the rucking event with giving back to the community. And thus, BrewRuck was born.

Breweries collected canned goods in barrels and raised money for local veterans. And then in the actual event, participants packed those heavy cans into their rucksacks and walked for miles and miles.

Curtiss attended one of those events in Charlotte, and decided he would host one back home in Greenville. When he was looking around for a beneficiary, he found Triune. He picked up *The Weight of Mercy*, and recognized that my children, Dustin and Taylor, were old high school friends of his.

So he figured, based on that very sketchy information, that we could be trusted. Under Curtiss's direction, local breweries asked their patrons to fill seven giant barrels with canned goods. They collected right at a ton of food in February, March and April.

On the day of the event in late April, 33 participants started out on an 8-mile trek from brewery to brewery to load up their rucksacks. To simulate the heavy logs that the Special Forces train with, they also loaded 200 pounds of canned goods into 8-foot-long PVC pipes. During the 8-hour event, walkers took turns carrying those pipes on their backs.

The next week, Curtiss and his volunteers delivered that entire ton of food they'd carried to our pantry.

When people see you doing good work, they will break down your door to join you.

And your work will ripple and ripple and ripple.

Just as Curtiss helped in the work we do to alleviate hunger among Greenville's disabled and poor citizens, it's our turn to add to the ripples of work done by one of our partners, Bread for the World. Coincidentally, our own Susan Stall is on its national board.

Bread for the World has been working for decades to end hunger. And they've made amazing progress. The world, with a strong commitment from the United States, has cut hunger and poverty rates nearly in half in the past 30 years.

In countries such as Ghana and Honduras, stunting has been reduced by nearly one-third in 10 years. Stunting is when a child does not grow and develop properly because of chronic malnutrition.

The critical period in a child's life is those 1,000 days beginning with the mother's pregnancy and going through age 2. If a child doesn't receive proper nutrition during that period, it can adversely impact brain development and physical development. When that

window is missed, the child will never reach her potential for health or education or earning power.

Each year Bread for the World targets a legislative goal for churches to address during an Offering of Letters. This year's letter urges Congress to increase funding for global child nutrition programs – basically to reach those mothers and children during that critical 1,000 days.

For despite all our progress, nearly 11 percent of the world remains hungry. One in 4 of the world's children are affected by stunting.

Seeing all the healthy, robust infants and toddlers, adolescents and teens who have begun worshipping at Triune should bring this message home to us. Not every culture, not every nation, can offer their children the most basic building blocks. What a shame – to have one's potential capped by the time he's 3 years old.

It's not much, our participation in this Offering of Letters. Volunteers will be at tables outside the sanctuary and dining hall with letters that will go to our senators and representatives. It won't take five minutes for you to sign them.

But it's a ripple we can send into the world, a joining of our voices with friends who care about helping people live into their full promise.

Even Mother Teresa said, "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples."

I see the book of Acts as a giant ripple in the New Testament. If the resurrection of Jesus was a boulder crashing into the Sea of Galilee, the book of Acts is the chain reaction that resulted. It tells of people swamped by the Word, drowning in the Holy Spirit. It tells of a ripple effect kept moving until this very day.

That makes Acts pretty dynamic reading. We've gone through it twice during my time here. As we'll talk about next week, it's the beach read of the Bible.

Today's Scripture passage is one of its gob-smacking stories.

If you'd like to read along, we're reading from **Acts 16: 16-34**. This is Luke reporting in a first-person narrative.

16 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.

17 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.' **18 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.**

19 But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place before the authorities. **20 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.’

22 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. 23 After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. 24 Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 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.

27 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.’

29 The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them outside and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’

31 They answered, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ 32 They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

33 At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. 34 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.

This happened. And because of it, this and this and this.

That's a ripple effect.

Sippio came in this Wednesday. He lived on the streets of Greenville for more than 30 years before working with us to get his driver's license, buy a car, get an apartment, obtain a pardon. We don't usually see him on Wednesdays, so I asked what he was doing. He'd come to give a homeless man a ride to a doctor's appointment.

That's a ripple effect.

In our Scripture, there is first the story of a slave girl who was making money for her owners by telling people's fortunes. She followed Paul and Silas, yelling loudly about who they were.

We don't know what was going on with her – demon possession, mental illness – but she got on Paul's last nerve. He turned and commanded a demon to leave her. She was healed, but her owners were out a moneymaker.

Do you remember the story of Jesus healing the demoniac who lived alone, chained among the tombs? Jesus sent his demons into a herd of pigs, and the pigs plunged over a cliff and drowned. And the townspeople, whose economic survival was threatened because all their pigs had died, begged Jesus to leave.

That's exactly what is going on here.

Someone was freed. But someone else was threatened.

The slave girl's owners had Paul and Silas arrested and beaten and thrown into prison. But the prison didn't dictate Paul and Silas's state of mind. The prison didn't imprison the missionaries' spirits.

Instead, they prayed and sang hymns so the other prisoners could overhear them. In other words, they were still spreading the gospel, even in prison. They were sending out ripples, even in prison.

Years and years ago, I had a Sunday school teacher who had a favorite line.

A man ran into a friend who asked how he was. "I'm doing pretty well," he answered, "under the circumstances."

And the friend replied, "What are you doing under there?"

Paul and Silas didn't let the circumstances of jail determine a thing. They refused to remain under their circumstances.

Because Acts is absolutely filled with supernatural events, an earthquake released the two evangelists. When their jailer woke up, he assumed the prisoners had escaped and prepared to kill himself.

But Paul shouted that the prisoners were still present. The jailer came in, listened to the reason for Paul and Silas's joy, and accepted the gospel.

Luke tells this story in almost comic book fashion: Wap! Bang! Boffo! The actions are broad and dramatic and sweeping.

But when it's all over, look at who is imprisoned and who is not.

The slave girl was a prisoner to a demon or mental illness. Now she is freed.

Her owners and the magistrates were free. But in Luke's hands, they stand against the risen Christ and end up slaves to ignorance.

Paul and Silas were prisoners of humans who defied the healing power of the gospel. But a prison could not hold them.

And finally, a jailer who made his living imprisoning others, is freed from both physical and spiritual death by his decision to accept the God of the prisoners who refused to escape.

This is the power of the gospel. It is rippling, rippling, rippling, no more to be contained that the ripples on Lake Hartwell after a speedboat passes.

In most churches, I imagine this prison of Paul and Silas is preached as a modern metaphor. And indeed, for many of us, it *is* a metaphor.

But many in this place have had the actual experience of jail and prison.

In most churches, I imagine hunger is preached as a metaphor – or at least as a result of dieting, not food scarcity.

But many in this place have had the actual experience of hunger due to empty cupboards. Or no cupboards.

And so we join in this community of Christians doing our part, sometimes creating ripples, sometimes helping the ripples of others to move along.

For if the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a boulder crashing into still waters, it is our discipleship that keeps those waters rippling.

Amen.