



## Main Street Congregational Church

145 Main Street, Amesbury MA 01913

### March 30, 2025 - Keep Singing - Doors Open

(Acts 16:25-34)

That jail guard. He has had a very curious night. Disrupted by those 2 prisoners who wouldn't shut up. They were locked behind cell doors. They were removed from the things and people they loved. Their future was uncertain at the least. And they wouldn't shut up. They kept singing. And the guard? There were no ear buds to put in and block them out. It kept coming - songs of praise, songs celebrating the love and power and presence of God. What's with that? That's not how it works in the prison system of threat, limit and control.

The empire has locked them up with the intent of silencing these people who are on fire for Jesus. It seems as though bigotry has won the day with Paul and Silas locked in chains but there are signs that the powers of this world are not really in charge heard in the surprising songs coming from that dark cell. They are singing praises to God - not laments for the suffering - but praise for the privilege of being God's servants in the face of injustice.

All this messes with the guard's head and world view. It was a bad night but then it got even worse for the guard. There was a disruption. An earthquake which, rather than collapsing and killing everyone, opened the doors to the prison cell. Rather than trapping and crushing the quake sets them free. Another upside down and backwards thing. Another problem for the guard. His neck is now on the line. The prisoners he was supposed to contain can get away. The guard will be in big trouble with his bosses. He prepares to kill himself. Except.

Except Paul and Silas see his distress and they minister to him. An open door gave them the opportunity to escape but they chose to stay and share their faith, to open the doors of fear and power which were barriers for the guard. The guard is thrown into a spin again. They could have taken off, gone back to their lives but they stay and offer healing and hope to the guard. Which gets to the guard's heart. He now senses that there is something about them and he wants to be part of what they have. He asks them what that "something" is - what do I need to really live? Paul and Silas respond sharing the love and story of Jesus. The guard opens the door of his home, offers healing to them, tends to their wounds and sets out a feast for them.

In our current reality hearing a story about literal ways to respond from a jail cell may be very practical and helpful for those of us that are considering non violent resistance. This way of responding is not limited to those behind prison doors though. It is a way of responding for all of us, any of us, who run up against doors of exclusion, isolation, limitation, cruelty, fear, violence - physically, emotionally, politically. Sing songs of hope and praise. Remember and open to the enduring presence and power of God's love. Repeat the truth of that presence in mantra, in song, in word. That it might hold you. Shape you. Guide you. Encourage you. That you might feel deep in your soul the sacred love that will not be silenced. The sacred love that resurrects. The sacred love that opens doors to make a way. The sacred love that slides doors shut to offer protection.

Stephanie Perdue wrote a column in Christian Century that touched my heart (and could also be used for one of Danny's join the choir promotions). In the column she names the fear she had about people losing their voices following the 2020 election and her response to that was to join a choir. From that experience she found singing songs of praise in community felt like a creative work of solidarity and an antidote to despair. She describes singing as an exercise in human cooperation. She recalls the psalmist asking how to sing God's holy songs in a strange land and remembers that the song emerges out of exile. She describes the tradition of songs sung in protest, lament and resistance by those whose voices the powers seek to hush, ignore or extinguish. She ends her column saying "when we fear losing our voices, the antidote is to know our songs and keep singing."

Our songs. The songs of God's love. God's presence. God's resurrecting. God's sustaining. God's opening doors. God's healing. God's endurance. Our songs. That can heal us as we sing in the shower or in community. Our songs that have healing and hope to offer to others. Our songs which have roots in the songs Paul and Silas sang from their prison cell. When we fear losing our voices, the antidote is to know our songs and keep singing. Amen.

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