

**The Slave Girl**  
Acts 16  
May 12 2013  
(Mothers' Day and Communion)

In a few minutes we'll be gathered here sharing our family supper - gathered around a table where everyone is welcome where we embody the prayer of Jesus that we might all be one.

It's a huge table – there's room here for everyone.

Always a place for one more. Lots of people tell me about growing up in the depression, or in rural places, where there was always room at the family table, always space for one more. That their mom would throw another potato in the pot, or another cup of water in the soup and say “pull up a chair”

That's what our table is like. Everyone is welcome. And the Mom, the life-giver who calls us to supper, is the life giver of all of us. We don't always know who is here at the table with us but one thing we do know: we're all brothers and sisters here and everyone belongs.

I have a confession to make: I started writing this while I was watching CSI. Do you ever watch that, the old original one? The theme song from that show – the line they keep repeating is “Who are you? I really wanna know”

And I found myself thinking about this slave girl. Who are you? I ask myself. I really wanna know. We don't even know her name.

Luke tells her story in just two verses:

16-18

That's not the end of the story  
but that's the end of her. We don't hear from her, or about her, ever again.

Now, I KNOW that's it is not Luke's intention to focus on the lives of these people. I know that he's making a point about the spreading of the gospel, and he does that skillfully and well.

But

I can't help but wonder about that little girl. What was her name? What happened to her after this? What would we hear if we could hear the story from her point of view?

Who are you? I really wanna know.

It's almost as though in the same way that her owners used her for their own economic purposes, Luke uses her for his own literary purposes.

So let's focus on her for a bit: First, I think that one of Luke's points is the same one he keeps making both in his gospel and in this, his second book: the theme is the breaking down of barriers, and the all-inclusive embrace of the gospel.

Last week he told us about Lydia, remember??

11-15

As we said last week, Lydia would have been not only a business woman, but a rich one. How do we know that? Purple. It's the purple. Purple dye had to be gathered drop by drop from a certain shellfish, and it was so labour intensive, so costly that the purple dye for one pound of wool cost the equivalent of \$300.

So...he tells about this rich woman, a gentile, with leanings toward Judaism, and immediately after, he tells about this slave girl.

On the one hand, a smart, rich, God-fearer  
on the other  
a poor, slave girl.

Side by side in his book  
AND side by side in the new community that's being built  
built by the followers of the One who died for saying that we're all equal in God's sight and we should start living that way.  
Side by side in the story, in the infant church,  
and side by side here at this table too.

I also know that Luke is writing his book in a way that is meant to make it clear to us that the things Jesus did when he walked among us  
his followers also did those things.

The church is HIS BODY doing and saying the same things he did and said.

It's here in Macedonia – in the city of Phillipi – that Paul's mission to the gentiles really begins.

(Acts 15.....council.....Peter and Paul part, dividing up the work...this is Paul's mission)

So here Paul begins with an exorcism. And just as Jesus began his ministry with an exorcism, Paul does the same.

So...that's part of the message. Here is the church, doing the same work Jesus did.

All of this is going on in the text, different levels of meaning, layers and layers of how the Spirit speaks through it. The more you dig, the more you find.

(I don't want to dwell on this particular question, but I have to at least mention it. Luke says she had a "spirit of divination" - what IS that? In the commentaries I read, they mostly say that she is mentally disturbed, unstable, perhaps schizophrenic - what do you think?

What she says to them is "\_\_\_\_\_"

I guess I have a question: how many people are labelled mentally ill because they speak the truth? Does she have a disability or a gift? And what's the difference? Who gets to say? She's a slave girl. Would

she have been labelled differently if she were a rich girl? Just a question)

Why was Paul annoyed, do you think? What this girl is saying is the truth. Was he angry because ....because someone associated with soothsaying – sort of like fortune telling at a carnival – is it that he didn't want to be associated with that kind of thing? They're new to the city, he doesn't want to make a first impression by having someone following him around shouting - was he concerned for his own reputation that way?

We don't know. What we do know is that he reacts quite sharply

and we never get to know how he treated her afterwards

because right away, the camera, as it were, moves away from her, and over to her owners, who realize that they can't make money from her anymore.

They are really mad.

Listen to the commentary of Michael Williams about that:

*“...then came a sharp downturn in her owners' misfortunes. It was for them, very bad news. The owners were shrewd enough to veil their greed.....and listen to how they deal with it. They don't just come out and say hey we can't make money from her any more....that would make them look bad. No. They do what most exploiters of the weak do – they dress up their anger in a costume of nationalism, patriotism, and good old fashioned religion.”*

Listen to what they say:

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We're upset because these men – well, they're Jews – are disturbing our fair city. Yea. And they're telling us to do things that are against our religion. We're loyal Romans, we're God fearing defenders of the country. Yes we are. And that's why we're so upset and that's why we're locking them up. National security.

It's a familiar picture....and as I ask this girl “Who are you? I really wanna know” I still don't know but I know I see her nightly on the news and daily on the street

And I pray that Paul and the others welcomed her into their community that she sat at the table with them.

I pray too that as we sit at this table  
we'll be very aware of them with us  
and others, gone before us but very much here....  
that we'll sit here with them, sisters and brothers together  
one mother  
and an empty chair