

Seventh Weekend of Easter (RCL/C)  
Acts 16:16-34  
June 1-2, 2019  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

**Operation Overlord:** the invasion of German-occupied France, years in the planning, actually beginning in the wee hours of the morning of June 6, 1944, 75 years ago this coming Thursday. The invasion happened in stages, with reinforcements still arriving and the plan still unfolding 2 months later, but in the first 24 hours 175,000 Allied soldiers crossed the English Channel (60 to 100 miles wide) in over 5,000 watercraft and in nearly 11,000 planes.

When Pastor Mark & I were privileged to visit Normandy this past September we saw the hedgerows that paratroopers hid behind after they landed and before they regrouped with their company, and we walked on Utah Beach and Bloody Omaha. They were peaceful, almost deserted and very, very quiet.... But our guide made sure we knew what a contrast that was to the exploding of mines, the pounding of artillery, the commands of officers, the cries of the wounded, the non-stop assault of noise from machine guns and rifles, on D-Day.

Gwen, our guide, is a thirty-something Frenchman married to a doctor from Haiti. He was anticipating moving there this year to reunite with his wife and their young son. He was well-versed and passionate about the story of D-Day, and deeply grateful to the U.S. and all the Allies for the **liberation** of France and ultimately of Europe that the invasion made possible.

I've been reading the book *D-Day* by Stephen Ambrose, and I recommend it to you. At the beginning Ambrose includes 1 or 2 line quotes about the invasion by Winston Churchill, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin and Dwight D. Eisenhower. He quotes Ike addressing the troops on June 4, 2 days before the invasion began, "Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God

upon this great and noble undertaking.”<sup>1</sup> Ambrose then adds this clip from war correspondent Ernie Pyle, filed in an article on June 12, 6 days into the battle:

“In this column I want to tell you what the opening of the second front entailed, so that you can know and appreciate and forever be humbly grateful to those both dead and alive who did it for you.”<sup>2</sup>

We just observed Memorial Day, remembering all those who have given the last full measure of devotion. D-Day certainly reminds us: “Freedom isn’t free.”

In occupied France, people may have been living in their own homes, but they weren’t free, any more than the Jews of Jesus’ time who lived under Roman occupation felt that they were free. Today’s first lesson from Acts tells a gripping tale about freedom and slavery, imprisonment and liberation.

It’s a story that’s chock-full of curious details. Did you have any questions about it as you listened?

Here’s a question I have for you: **who’s slave and who’s free?? Who’s in captivity and who’s been liberated?**

- There’s a **slave-girl**. She’s doubly enslaved, according to the writer of Acts. She’s slave to a human master **and** she’s possessed by a “spirit of divination” that Paul casts out. It’s **so** interesting that what the girl cries out again and again, as she follows after Paul and Silas, is, “*These men are **slaves** of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.*” (Acts 16:17) (Maybe she felt they were kindred spirits, on account of her impression that they were **all** slaves....) Day in, day out, she trots along behind them, and Paul begins to feel like she’s stalking them. He becomes “very much annoyed.” He commands the soothsaying, fortune-telling spirit to depart and it does. Score 1 for the good guys. But that’s not how her masters and business managers see it. Their source of income has now

dried up, thanks to Paul. So they basically sue him for lost wages, in a 1<sup>st</sup> century kind of way.

- From the outside looking in, these **guys who own the slave-girl** are free. No one's ordering **them** around. But they're in bondage to "the almighty dollar" or its equivalent in 1<sup>st</sup> century Greece. They're so angry that their financial picture has darkened that they haul Paul and Silas before the magistrates, the-powers-that-be in town so they can be punished for daring to mess with their income stream.
- The **magistrates** seem to be top dogs on the totem pole, but they're afraid they're going to be demoted fast after realizing they've illegally subjected Paul & Silas, Roman citizens, to beating, public humiliation, unjust imprisonment, from which they're supposed to be protected.
- **Paul and Silas** become prisoners in a literal sense – they're locked up in an inner cell of the jail and even put in the stocks – but they remain free in spirit, free enough to capture the attention of the other prisoners by singing and praying aloud at midnight.
- **The jailer**, the one with the key to the prison cell and to the stocks, wasn't as free as he looked – not once the earthquake occurred and he assumed his prisoners had all escaped. He was ready to kill himself, before the warden did it for him: the penalty of having prisoners escape in those days was to face whatever fate they would have if they'd stuck around.

So Paul shouts out to him what would make a great motto for suicide prevention societies:

*"Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."* (Acts 16:28) The jailer is so thankful, so amazed, he asks Paul and Silas:

*“Sirs, what do I have to do to be saved, to really live?” They said, “Put your entire trust in the Master Jesus. Then you’ll live as you were meant to live—and everyone in your house included!” (Acts 16:30-31)*

That is **true freedom** that no occupying army, no court of law, no jailer can take away.

*“Put your entire trust in the Master Jesus. Then you’ll live as you were meant to live....”*

In Christ we are freed **from** “sin, death and the devil” and freed **for** a life of faith-active-in-love. The jailer understood that: even **before** he was baptized he tenderly cared for Paul & Silas, bathing & binding their wounds, feeding them, celebrating with them.

The jailer went back to work the next day, and Paul and Silas went with him. The magistrates somehow changed their minds and decided to let Paul and Silas go – but Paul insisted the magistrates come themselves to release them, maybe so they could ‘fess up to their error in beating and detaining them in the first place. Paul wanted the fledgling Christian community in Philippi to know he and Silas were not scofflaws!

Bible scholars have guessed that the slave-girl out of whom Paul cast the foreign spirit became part of the home church led by Lydia, whom we heard about last week. She to serve a greater Lord, the Lord Jesus. We have been, too. As the poet Richard Lovelace reminds us all:

"Stone walls **do not a prison make**, Nor **iron bars** a cage...."  
"To Althea, from Prison," 1642

Amen

<sup>1</sup>Stephen E. Ambrose, *D-Day* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

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