

## **TUESDAY COMMUNION**

Seizing the opportunity

Hymn:

Reading: Acts 16.25-34 (Paul in Philippi)

Prayers:

Over the last three weeks we've heard about things happening to Paul and Silas as if by chance. Having just arrived in Philippi, they are on their way to the synagogue when they meet some women down by the river. Lydia hears them speak and offers them hospitality at her home, thereby providing them with a base.

Another day they encounter the unfortunate slave-girl who is making a fortune through her ravings. This encounter gives them the chance to heal her and restore her to a sound mind "in the name of Jesus Christ".

Her owners cause an anti-Semitic riot and the local magistrates order them to be beaten without any trial. They are thrown into prison where an earthquake takes place and they are set free.

In our reading today we encounter the jailor who out of fear of what the authorities will do to him if they discover his prisoners have fled and out of personal shame, is about to commit suicide. (One has to say that Luke does sometime write in the style of a Victorian penny-thriller!)

But though the doors of the prison are opened Paul assures him no one has escaped. Then that question, "What must I do to be saved?"

Here is an opportunity for Paul to speak about Jesus and how trust in him unites with a God who never despairs of us and never lets us go. He's the God we can trust in good times and bad, in the times of our successes and our failures." So, "Believe on the Lord Jesus," promises Paul, "and you will be saved."

So how does this passage link in with our Advent season? Well, here are two ways. First, that mention of baptism reminds us of John the Baptist who baptised as a sign of repentance and forgiveness. He also said that whilst his baptism was with water the "more powerful than I" would baptise with the Holy Spirit.

The baptism of the jailor and his household is the way in which very early in the life of the church women and men were brought into the family of the church. It was a sign of their trust in the God they had met in Jesus.

Yet, in this Advent Season we are also aware that the outward symbolism also needs an inner response and openness to God. Indeed, the same is true in our communion: the outer symbolism of taking bread and wine must have its inward open of our lives to Christ so that his Spirit may shape our thoughts and actions.

The second link with Advent is in the way God uses the ordinary chances of this life to work out his purposes.

Luke, in his Gospel, tells of how the Roman Emperor far away in the capital sets of a chain of events which lead to Mary and Joseph leaving their home in Nazareth and journeying to Bethlehem. For Luke and Matthew, the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem is a fulfilment of the prophecy that the Messiah will come from this "City of David".

Perhaps we look back over our lives and sense that God has used the changes and chances of this world to both offer us new possibilities for our lives and times when we have been able to bear witness to what we most deeply believe.

So, we can give thanks for the way throughout history God weaves his purpose not through the extraordinary but through the ordinary events of life. He invites us to use well the opportunities he gives us as a church and as individuals in the midst of the everyday.

Amen.