**Christians are bringers of joy
Acts 16.16-34**

So, today, on this last Sunday of the Easter season we conclude our short sermon series looking at how God calls us to ‘go’ and make disciples; sharing the good news of Jesus and inviting people to commit to following him.

We’ve journey with the early church through the book of Acts and thought about how we are to be witnesses to Jesus, explain peoples’ religious experiences and demonstrate the Gospel.
Last week we thought about how the Spirit guides us to help us with these tasks.
This week we conclude by thinking about how, as Christians, we are called to be “bringers of joy”, guided by more of the exploits of St Paul; Acts 16.16-34…

Acts 16.16-34 finds St Paul in the Roman colony of Philippi in Macedonia (modern day northern Greece).
You’ll recall from last week that Paul had been led there by the Holy Spirit; by the Spirit blocking his way into Asia and Bithynia, and giving him a vision of a man from Macedonia calling him to “come over and help us”.

Arriving in Philippi Paul had followed his usual evangelistic strategy of going to the place where Jews gathered for prayer on the sabbath; had shared the gospel, and a woman named Lydia, and her whole household, had come to faith and been baptised.
Paul had then stayed with Lydia and from this base had continued to share the gospel in Philippi.

In today’s reading, Acts 16.16-21, Paul casts a demon out of a slave girl, more from frustration than anything else (!) but this lands Paul, and his companion Silas, in trouble with the girl’s owners as they lose the chance to make money from her fortune telling.

Paul and Silas are publicly flogged and put in jail… things don’t seem to be going well!

But as Paul and Silas sit in chains in a dark prison cell in the middle of the night… singing hymns and praying (!) God sends an earthquake and their chains fall off and the prison doors swing open.

The jailor is about to kill himself… far better than the torture that might await him if the prisoners get free… but no one has escaped, the jailor falls at Paul’s feet asking what he must do to be saved, and after Paul has explained the gospel, the jailor and his whole family believe in Jesus and are baptised.

… “And the jailor was *filled with joy* because he had come to believe in God – *he and his whole family*” (Acts 16.34).

You know, there is no greater joy in life than coming into a relationship with God as your loving heavenly Father, through faith in Jesus Christ.
There really isn’t!

Perhaps some of us have forgotten the sheer joy of that moment of surrender to Jesus; or maybe over time familiarity has bred contempt…
Maybe we’ve not seen someone around us become a Christian in a long time and we’ve forgotten just how much joy salvation brings to a new believer.

If we have, that’s a shame.

Perhaps its worth just stopping for a moment and reminding ourselves of some of the reasons why believing in Jesus and surrendering our lives to him is the thing that will bring us, ultimately, the most joy we could ever experience.
Here’s just a few:

In believing and surrendering to Jesus we:

Are reborn as children of God (John 1.12); and so, move from death to life (Ephesians 2.1-5).

Our sins are forgiven and past mistakes are wiped away (2 Corinthians 5.17).

We receive the gift of God’s Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1.13), to connect us to God, to teach us and guide us and to make us more like Jeus (John 16.13).

We find meaning and purpose in life, as we give ourselves to serving God’s purposes in the world and building his kingdom which will last forever (1 Peter 2.9).

We gain a new family of brothers and sisters; a family where we belong and are loved (1 Corinthians 15.58).

We receive a living hope that one day we will spend eternity with Jesus in a new heaven and a new earth; where there will be no more pain or suffering (Revelation 21.1-4).

And the good news is that we get not only to experience this joy ourselves, but through “going” and sharing the Gospel, we get to help others experience this joy too… and that brings us even more joy!
Jesus said that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety nine ‘righteous’ people who do not need to repent (Luke 15.7).
One repentant sinner brings joy in heaven!
and we get to share in that joy on earth!
Whey Hey!

I love the fact that the Philippian jailor is filled with joy, because “he *and his whole family*” believed.
We don’t know who was in his family.
It may well have included older relatives, children, and even servants or slaves.

There is something very special when a whole family comes to faith and can share their Christian journey together.
Parents can pray with their children.
Everyone can go to church together – church isn’t something that separates the family but unites it and holds it together.
In good times and in bad, there is the rock of Jesus upon which the whole family can stand.
And the Christian family will also reach wider than itself, to include others; those who are single, those who are widowed, even the outsider or refugee who needs a place to belong. Family will be *inclusive,* not exclusive.

There is, of course, a cost to ‘going’ and sharing Jesus.
It was Paul and Silas being flogged and imprisoned that brought the opportunity to share Jesus with the jailor.

In 2 Corinthians 4.8-10 Paul famously writes:

*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.*

But joy, ultimately, is not a feeling dependent on circumstances.
It is a gift of God’s Spirit that is our strength despite the circumstances and hardships we might, or might not, face.
A gift that God holds out to all who will come to him…
And a gift he calls us to share…