

Living Church Beyond Walls

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church,

Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher and Rev. Mary Koon

September 13, 2020, Joshua 6:15-16, 20 & Acts 16:23-40

Anne: Today is our Car Rally Rally Sunday where we kick off the church year! Over the years, we have done many different themes, and celebrated in different ways. This year our theme is **Living Church beyond Walls!** Keeping with that theme our 2021 Pledge drive is **Building Church Beyond walls.** At this time, we are breaking out of these walls. As Oak Grove Church, we are showing what a church can do and be in 2020 and 2021!

The Bible has stories of moving beyond the walls. Today I want to share two dramatic Bible stories. The first is found in Joshua. The people of Israel are at the Jordan ready to settle in the land that has been promised to them. One little problem, the land is occupied by someone else. They have some walls to break down. We pick up the story at the point when the people of Israel had been marching silently around the outside of the city walls for six days. It must have been quite a site!

Joshua 6:15-16, 20

¹⁵On the seventh day they rose early, at dawn, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. ¹⁶And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, “Shout! For the LORD has given you the city. ²⁰So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpets, they raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat; so the people charged straight ahead into the city and captured it.

There is a lot more to this story. But remember that the people followed God’s precise direction even while the odds were against them. They faced impenetrable walls. But they were victorious.

Our second Bible story from Acts is just as dramatic. Paul and Silas tell the story of Christ. A psychic slave girl made lots of money for her owner by telling fortunes. As Paul and Silas came to town, she began yelling, “These guys know what they are saying. They are men of God...listen to them.” She did not do this only once, but she kept up until Paul got rather perturbed with her. He stops, turned around and in the name of God healed her so that she could no longer tell fortunes.

Needless to say, the owner was not happy about this. There goes easy income. The owner of the girl has Paul and Silas thrown in jail and we pick it up from there.

Acts 16:23-40

²³After they had given them a severe flogging; they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. ²⁷When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” ²⁹The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰Then he brought them outside and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³²They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. ³⁴He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Mary: As you can see, in this case, the walls were shaken and the doors open but Paul and Silas refuse to get out. All the prisoners stay in place. What's with that? Here was their chance to make a break leave that nasty prison behind and they stay.

It was a shock to the jailer -- he knew what would happen to him. It would not only be the end of his career but the end of his life if he had to answer to the authorities with an empty prison.

He was so grateful that he wanted to know what Paul was about. Paul became a witness to the power of God through Jesus Christ. But wait, there is more to the story...

³⁵When morning came, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." ³⁶And the jailer reported the message to Paul, saying, "The magistrates sent word to let you go; therefore come out now and go in peace." ³⁷But Paul replied, "They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they going to discharge us in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves." ³⁸The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; ³⁹so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰After leaving the prison they went to Lydia's home; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed.

Anne: From Joshua to Paul it is apparent that walls don't matter. The residents of Jericho thought that their walls would protect them. They thought they had nothing to worry about even if this band of people were marching silently around their city every day. They placed their trust in their walls. In the end, the walls fell flat.

When the earthquake brought down the prison gates, the walls no longer confined Paul and the prisoners but they did not leave. No longer did the

walls keep them in but that did not matter. The strength and the security of the walls of the prison made no difference.

We know, as followers of the risen Christ, that even death does not confine us as Jesus breaks the walls of death and sin with his resurrection. This our message to live by and to share.

Jesus is not confined by the walls of class and race, culture and status. He spoke to Samaritans and prostitutes, slaves and free, He healed a Roman officer's daughter and cured lepers who were avoided by all.

Mary: Oak Grove Presbyterian Church can never, never be defined strictly by these walls. Oak Grove Church is what it is because of our actions. Particularly this year, we are Oak Grove beyond these walls. In our worship, in our teaching our children and youth, in our outreach to member and stranger alike. We have never stopped being the church and we will continue to be the light shining in a dark world. We are a church beyond our walls. But it is not our message alone. This is the time when our community and our world need to know that LOVE matters. Let's move from our walls and be a church to the world.

Amen and Amen