



The Philippian Slave Girl:

Reflections on the New Testament reading for the 7th Sunday after Easter Acts 16: 16 - 25

This slave girl had probably been captured during a period of Imperial expansion. One of the impacts of war or annexation by political states, (or globalising capital), has been that women, children and men can become enslaved, owned, vulnerable to capture by incoming power-brokers. Adam Smith, the liberal economist and philosopher of the eighteenth century, commented on this at the height of the challenges to the transatlantic slave trade:

The pride of man makes him love to domineer, and nothing mortifies him so much as to be obliged to condescend to persuade his inferiors. Wherever the law allows it, and the nature of the work can afford it, therefore, he will generally prefer the service of slaves to that of freemen.

The symptoms of abuse, neglect and dehumanisation which Smith abhorred in the transatlantic slave trade are all present in the enslavement of women into prostitution today. The 'pride of man' still inclines many to domineer, and to prefer the service of slaves to that of the personally challenging evolving relationship with a free woman.

The Slave Girl – used for the private gain of her 'owners' was forced to tell the fortunes of those who passed by; pimped by others for her gifts of foreknowledge. Those who consulted her for ten minutes on their way to worship, business or relaxation, will have given scant regard to her condition: an enslaved foreigner in a thriving Roman city. Her 'owners' only interest is in maximising her earning potential as they set her to work each day.

Paul and Silas eventually recognise her bondage. 'Very much annoyed' Paul breaks the cycle of her abuse by liberating her from being the means of economic gain for her owner. Her skill as a fortune teller is jettisoned, and with it her journey to freedom begins. Of course there are other steps along the way which have to occur. What will her former owners do as retribution? Where she will stay? How she will earn her living? Can she be restored to her homeland and reunited with her loved ones? These are her big questions which are left unanswered. The focus remains on the fate of Paul and Silas and their missionary break-through in Philippi; the conversion of the Philippian Jailer.

NOT FOR SALE Sunday is an initiative of CHASTE.

All funds raised will help CHASTE to take forward its work and vision to end trafficking for sexual exploitation.

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Where women are caught today in Prostitution, (and there are, in the UK alone, over 80,000 women caught in the market for pay-as-you-go sex, or enslaved in trafficking for sexual exploitation), we await the rising up of the Spirit of outrage and of empathy. We need practical love in order to liberate these women.

At present our culture condones “ownership” and “client use”, exploitation and pay- as-you-go-abuse-of-another. We already have the ability in our police forces, our social services, our health services, our legal professions and our churches to provide the liberating power.

We have the ability, but not (yet) the tasked budgets. We have the ability but not (yet) the political will. We have the ability but not (yet) the legislation to protect those liberated as they seek sustainable ways into their individual futures; as they undergo the painful, slow journey of exodus.

We have the ability but not (yet) the authoritative word of *all* the churches (against which the power of Hades cannot prevail), to say “Enough! Let the slave girl go free! Break the power of demand! Let women, men, children live in equality and respect!”

CHASTE works providing counselling at point of referral, (when woman are rescued or escape from their captors). We work creating a network of those who provide safe housing for them. We operate in solidarity with those building exit-strategies and resistance to grooming, pimping and client-use of those caught in UK prostitution. We promote awareness-raising liturgy. We lobby – directly - those in political authority. We create networks for the safe return and future jobs for women who’ve been liberated.

Our task is dynamic, prophetic and deeply under-resourced. We need funds of a size which can turn “pilot schemes” into mainstreamrealities.

Not for Sale Sunday is part of a nationwide movement to raise awareness and to inform the voice of Christians today. This *is* the market place of Philippi, where those whose profits or mores are disturbed turn violent and aggressive. Paul and Silas were imprisoned for an act of liberation. Do not be surprised if people today want us silenced, as we begin to liberate slaves.

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Where we speak out on the expansion of sex- tourism, lap-dancing clubs, “leisure evenings-out” in brothels, massage parlours, escort services, we shall encounter opposition.

Thankfully the forces of law and order are unlikely to imprison us. But CHASTE personnel and those who work in this area have to face menace and aggression whilst confronting and undermining, “owners” and potential clients from time to time.

Paul and Silas acted locally in the city of Phillippi. Their interventions promoted the growth of the church, the welfare of those they liberated, and the understanding of all those who saw and heard them. *We* need to learn to think and act locally, nationally and globally; to pray for liberation and courage.

This is a message for all ages. We need to start engaging with the challenge of liberation from slavery; in our youth work, our schools, home groups, mum’s groups, men’s groups, our church leadership and our outreach teams. We need to address one of the malign spirits of our age, which needs to be rebuked and sent packing.

Thanks be to God.

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