



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for September 25, 2022**  
**“Making a Difference: Focused on Family”**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: Acts 16:25-34**

## **The Royal Funeral**

Queen Elizabeth’s funeral this past week was quite the affair. People stood in line for hours to pay their respects. Hundreds of thousands lined the streets of London to catch a glimpse of her funeral procession.

The Queen’s funeral was a celebration not only of her life, but of country as well. If you think about it, the funeral was also a celebration of family. Her family gathered upon her death and stayed with things throughout. I commented often during the week about how exhausted they must be. Family is important at times such as funerals.

The world watched as William and Harry were re-united during the funeral. The press leads us to believe that their relationship is strained these days, and it very well may be. I was interested to read what King Charles’ former butler, Grant Harrold, said about the two coming together during the funeral. “*Their show of unity was no PR stunt,*” he said. “*It was a show of family unity.*” The two wanted to be together, as strained as things have been.

## **Drawn to Family**

While it is not universally the case, we are drawn to family. It is in family that we gain strength, are offered support, and experience love. It is always hurtful when such things aren’t evident in family. Most want the best for their families and will do almost anything to see that that happens.

That “*best*” for family often translates into making sure that the spiritual needs of one’s family are taken care of. We find that very thing taking place in our scripture for today.

We mentioned it just briefly last week and look at it more closely this week. We do that taking into consideration what it means to be focused on family. Let’s hear then this reading from Acts 16:25-34.

## **Acts 16:25-34**

*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”*

*The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*

*They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.*

### **What Must I Do to Be Saved?**

Paul and Silas were all about worshipping God. They did that with great gusto while in the Philippian jail. The scripture records that it was *"about midnight"* and they were *"praying and singing hymns to God."*

Their worship caught the attention of the other prisoners. It had caught the attention of God as well. Seemingly out of nowhere an earthquake struck that loosened their chains and opened the door to their cell. The two could have walked if they wanted.

Not surprisingly, the jailkeeper was panicked. He was charged with keeping the inmates securely behind bars. Now they could simply walk away. The jailer became so desperate that he drew his sword to kill himself. Under Roman law, if a prisoner escaped the life of the jailer was demanded in his place.

Paul stepped in, *"Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"* The jailer called for lights and saw that that was indeed the case. He was so overwhelmed with relief that he fell trembling before Paul and Silas asking, *"What must I do to be saved?"*

### **Recognition and Response**

The jailer recognized that something very special was going on. He recognized that something was afoot even more special than that well-placed earthquake.

When it comes to such things, I remember Elijah's encounter with God as recorded in I Kings 19:11-13. A great wind blew, but the Lord was not in it. An earthquake came, but the Lord was not in it. Next there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. Lastly, Elijah noticed a *"gentle whisper,"* and it was the Lord speaking into his life.

I don't know about you, but the Lord speaks to me with a *"gentle whisper"* more than any other way.

Earthquake or not, God was moving. His power was on display, not just to open the door of the jail, but to open the hearts of those who were witnesses to the great thing God was doing. In his desperation, and he was desperate, the jailer knew that God held the key to his salvation.

As the scripture tells us, at Paul's encouragement, the jailer put away his sword. There was no reason for him to take his own life. On the contrary, there was every reason to live into the new life that God was now offering in Jesus Christ.

The offer of new life was extended not only to the jailer, but to his family as well. They too would come to recognize that God was moving and would sign on for themselves. Their response, and I intentionally use the words *"their response,"* because the jailer's family was also baptized that day. What took place was a family affair.

I am mindful of the words of Joshua in Joshua 24:15, *"But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."* (Joshua 24:15)

The jailer brought Paul and Silas to his house and served them a meal. The whole family was there. The meal gave Paul and Silas plenty of opportunity to share the good things about Jesus. The two leaned into the life of that family and the household was saved that day. They were filled with intense joy because they had come to believe in God.

## **Ministry to Families**

Paul and Silas didn't just leave things with the jailer, but they reached out to the entire family. That's a big part of what we do here. The sound of children is all over this place throughout the week and on Sundays.

I come in every morning to the sound of children, lining up to head into class at our Preschool. During the afternoons buses come rolling in to drop off kids for our afterschool program. Those kids run into the gym just outside my office window with great excitement. On Wednesdays, AWANA fires up. My Wednesday Night Men's Small Group meets in the Lobby. Right in the middle of it, the children come stampeding through off to their next adventure. Some of those kids even stop to give their dad a hug.

In just a couple of months our gym will be full of families taking part in Upward Basketball. Last summer the Sanctuary was full of kids participating in Vacation Bible School. MOPS meets every month to offer support to mothers of preschoolers. All of these, and I have even mentioned Sunday mornings.

It is just in us to be family focused. The challenge for us is in welcoming those families into the full life of this congregation. That is happening more and more, for which I am thankful, but we need not rest until every family who doesn't have a church home finds one here.

I have stated that as we find ourselves pulling out of Covid and after a season of rather robust attention on the building our focus needs to be on three things: worship, discipleship leads to service and evangelism, and families, particularly young families.

These three things have helped me be more focused and I pray they will help you be more focused as well.

Betsy needs your help on Sunday mornings to help disciple the young people who come, particularly at 10:30. She'd love to hear from you.

We'll need plenty of help during Upward. Sign-ups start tomorrow. Don Dugan would be glad to talk with you about that.

We can always use more volunteers on Wednesday nights during AWANA.

We can certainly use leaders who will seek out young adults, whether here or in the community, to lend support in small groups or one on one.

All these things help keep our ministry focused on families.

The Orange Curriculum we use for children and youth discipleship encourages us not only to stay at the good things that are happening here, but to encourage even greater things to happen at home. Let's face it, we have contact with our children and youth for such a short time each week. Parents are interacting with those children and youth so much more. We'd do well to help encourage and equip our parents to lead their children spiritually, to the place where we as a church are simply coming alongside them.

## **The Extended Family of the Church**

A lot of churches in our Annual Conference are one- or two-family churches. That sort of things happens more in rural areas than in urban areas. Now when I talk about family here, I am talking about extended families.

I have been a part of such churches where families come together to form a family of a different sort, the church family. We are a lot like that, although we involve more than just a couple of families.

We are a church family focused not only on the families that participate here, but on those who don't, those families in our community, and particularly those who don't profess faith in Jesus.

Luke does not tell us what became of the jailer and his family. We can only imagine that they joined with other families to form a vibrant church, one that became the very apple of Paul's eye.

Paul in his letter to the Church in Philippi writes *"to all the saints in Jesus Christ who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons."* The jailer might not have been a bishop or a deacon, but he was certainly one of the saints. He had given his life to Christ and made sure his family was given ample opportunity to do so as well.

Let's pray then for our families. Let's pray for the families of our community. Let's pray that we would stay focused upon all those families to the end that our identity as a church is truly family focused.