**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 16:19-40 MSG

 I had ended our previous message series on connectedness with Jesus walking on water, quieting the storm with the disciples immediately arriving at their destination where their work WITH Jesus continued. I had commented that this passage in Mark 6 encompassed all we had talked about in the series. Our need to be connected to the di-VINE- vine, Jesus, which is not only needed so WE can get through OUR storms but when connected to Jesus we’re also placed in the same boat with other believers- working and serving together.

 As I reflected on this passage the storm also brought our next message series to light when causing me to ask, ‘*what storms are we fighting against and are in need of Jesus to quiet or in this case -unknot*?’

 What I have come to find is that situations or emotions can create knots within us. As shown here (hold up) For the next 2 maybe 3 weeks we will address and will hopefully be able to loosen some of our common knot producers.

 The first knot we’ll reflect on is bitterness. In Webster’s dictionary bitterness is defined as ‘*a complex, multi layered emotion described as a mixture of disappointment, disgust, anger and fear*. These feelings cause resentment -*a feeling of indignant displeasure or ill will to something or someone B/C of feeling wronged, insulted or injured*.

 This bitter pill if swallowed is harmful to the overall health of our body, mind, heart and spirit. And to understand further we’ll be offering a skit based on Acts 16. But 1st a little background.

 As soon as Paul and Silas arrived in Philippi a woman began following them shouting that they were servants of God -able to tell people the way to be saved. She wasn’t doing this as a follower of The Way, but B/C she had an evil spirit this enabled her to have great insights- which made her owners rich.

 However Paul had enough and by the power OF the HS he cast out the evil spirit freeing her. Her owners were OUTRAGED. As they released her- they grabbed Paul and Silas-dragging them to the market place. Soon they got the crowd on their side causing an uproar whereby the police had to come.

**Narrator** –**PSD** When the police arrested them, they pulled them into court with the accusation,

**Police**-**Sue** “These men are disturbing the peace—dangerous Jewish agitators subverting our Roman law and order.”

**Narrator** By this time the crowd had turned into a restless mob out for blood. The judges went along with the mob,

**Police**- take blankets off Paul and Silas- pretend to rough them up –then put the chains on their hands and take Paul and Silas up the Altar stairs and sit them on the chairs-

**Police- Sue**- Get in this cell- it’s the one with maximum security! And you… Jailer- make sure you keep them under heavy guard so there will be no chance of escape for you know what will happen to you if they did. (do a cut throat sign) – you can sit in 1st pew

**Jailer Silvia**- And to make sure you don’t get any funny ideas about escaping, I’m putting these leg chains on you. In your condition and with all this- you won’t be going anywhere! (laugh sarcastically) Jailer -Looking pleased with yourself- go sit in front pew

Do you think a severe beating and the treatment they rec’d was deserved? No! They were stripped, publically humiliated, beaten severely and thrown into a cold, damp and dirty jail in great pain with open wounds!

Could they have been bitter and resentful- they had every right to be. However, in whatever they DID feel, they didn’t let them turn into bitterness. We know this B/C of the next part of the story.

**NARRATOR**- You are all prisoners in this jail so put on your handcuffs. You also have a part- when the earthquake hits- remember to shake this way and that way!

**Paul-Marj** Silas I know we’ve prayed to God about all this- heaven help us- not only to get out of this situation, but that we can forgive those who did this to us! I know it’s about midnight, but I think we should sing a robust hymn to God. (Start singing a bit of a powerful hymn-then stop)

Silas look- all the other prisoners. They can’t believe their ears.

**Silas**-**Linda** I’ve got an idea! Why don’t all you prisoners join us in singing! We can sing Jesus loves me. It’ll be fun!!!!

**SING**: 709- Jesus Loves Me

**Narrator** - Then, without warning, a huge earthquake shook everything and everyone! The jailhouse tittered, the jailhouse tottered, every door flew open, all the prisoners were loose.

Startled from sleep, the SHOCKED jailer saw all the doors swinging loose on their hinges. Assuming that all the prisoners had escaped, he pulled out his sword and was about to do himself in, figuring he was as good as dead anyway, when Paul stopped him:

**Paul** “Don’t do that! We’re all still here!

**Silas**- ‘Nobody’s run away!”

The **jailer** got a torch and ran inside. Badly shaken, he bowed in front of Paul and Silas. Then led them out of the jail and asked,

**Jailer**- “Sirs, what do I have to do to be saved, to really live?”

 Let’s stop here for a moment. We spoke before that Paul and Silas had every right to be bitter- they had every right to show resentment and perhaps even to seek revenge, but they knew that wouldn’t REALLY be living and it would be counterproductive to the freedom Jesus gave them when dying for their sins. How could they do this?

 By believing in and assuring that their connection to Christ was open- which allowed Christ to flow through them- and they accomplished this through prayer and by allowing the HS to help them. They also took what Jesus taught to heart- “*forgive us our debts-just as we forgive our debtors*.” It was their ability to embrace ALL this that enabled them to do this next part in our story.

**Paul** “Put your entire trust in the Master Jesus. Then you’ll live as you were meant to live—and everyone in your house included!”

**Jailer-** what do you mean?

**Paul** -Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved- not only you, but your entire household.” You see Jesus came from heaven and performed many miracles- he taught the people all about being God’s children- his disciples could see Jesus was the fulfillment of long ago prophecies. Then he did something that was amazing- he allowed himself to die on the cross for all the sins of those who would believe in him. They buried him and then guess what?

**Jailer*-*** What?

**Silas*-***God brought him back to life on the 3rd day- he stayed around for 40 days and then he went up to heaven to be with God the Father- Now we, as believers, can go to heaven too! When we confess our sins and repent- change the ways that are not pleasing to God- We are forgiven- Our sin no longer separates us from God- we are brought back to God as his children.

**Narrator=** They never did get to bed that night. **The** jailer made them feel at home, dressed their wounds, and then—he couldn’t wait till morning!—was baptized, he and everyone in his family. **There** in his home, he had food set out for a festive meal. **It** was a night to remember: **He** and his entire family had put their trust in God; everyone in the house was in on the celebration.

 This is a WONDERFUL example of faith and in trusting the Lord so much that there is rejoicing in ALL circumstances. Before I spoke about Jesus’ teaching about forgiveness, but we’ll notice in this next part of the story that they also weren’t led into temptation by showing malice.

**Narrator**- The next morning the Roman authorities sent police officers with the order,

**Police**-to the jailer “Let those men go.”

**Jailer-** to Paul and Silas “The officials have sent an order for you and Silas to be released. You may leave, then, and go in peace.” **Take chains off them**

**Paul-**(to Police), Wait! Go in peace, REALLY! We were not found guilty of any crime, yet they whipped us in public without even hearing our side of the story and to top it off- we are Roman citizens! Then they threw us in prison. And now they want to send us away quietly? I don’t think so! Let your higher-ups come and escort us out! All can sit down

 The judges were shocked by this news. They knew they were wrong. They went to the jail and did as Paul asked. However, what Paul asked WASN’T B/C of bitterness.

 What he did- he did to help them see that THEIR words and actions were misguided and hurtful B/C they didn’t seek to fully understand the situation. I also believe he asked for this, so HE could release any ill feelings that may have been felt- which is healthy to do.

 Paul may have shown us HOW there can be an absence of bitterness and malice here in ACTS, but he goes on to teach this to the church in Ephesus in Eph. 4:32, ‘Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, and slander along with every form of malice.’

 I imagine that Paul could teach this B/C he knew from personal experience that letting bitterness & resentment bind you up-really ISN’T living! IT CAN’T BE! B/C when we allow either to happen, it causes knots- not only in our shoulders, but in our relationships AND in our connection to Christ.

 When there’s a knot- Jesus CAN’T possibly flow freely through us, can he?

And if we don’t pray for our knots to be undone and work at undoing them, they begin to build and build. Soon perceived slights cause our fuse to become so short –that we explode affecting many or we implode causing us to fall INTO ourselves & hide.

 It’s OK to feel betrayed or hurt by another person’s actions, or mad at someone for what they’ve said or done, but letting THAT turn into bitterness is harmful to US and to our relationships with people and with God.

 I’ve experienced it myself. In fact, it was something God brought to my attention during my sabbatical. When I took the time to actually sit down- pray about it and see it, I was amazed at what I’ve been holding on to and I worked on loosening it- it’s still a work in progress, but I feel it’s loose enough to allow Jesus to flow through me a little bit easier & I feel better too.

 When WE say YES to Christ and accept his generous gift of forgiveness, it’s a new beginning for us, isn’t it? However, God hopes that we’ll give a gift in return and THAT gift is for us to forgive others and extend the GRACE we’ve been shown to others.

 This can be one of the hardest challenges we face in life! The pain and hurt others cause us is real and great. BUT, the pain of living with bitterness & resentment can poison our souls, destroy us, or at the very least- make our life dark and full of aggravation.

 Don’t get me wrong, when we forgive others, we’re not saying that what they said or did was OK and what Paul shows us in ACTS- is that we can also calmly address our feelings with someone –enabling us to release them to God so we can let go of bitterness’s hold on us no matter what THEIR response is.

 The rope you were given to put around your hands in our skit is yours to keep. We’re all prisoners of something that has a hold on us. Each causes a crimp in our connection to Christ-preventing Jesus to flow through us easily.

 I encourage you to take the rope to a quiet place- see what knots God is showing you-pray- ask for God to loosen a knot and keep working on it until you can unknot it. Then breathe a sigh of relief, thanking Christ for the freedom he gave you so that you CAN REALLY LIVE as one who is saved.

 I pray that we take this time in the next few weeks leading up to Advent to loosen as many knots as possible for when we do –it will enable us to find a greater life of hope, peace, joy, and love as we journey onward.

God of earthquakes, break open the prisons that hold our bitterness, and free our hearts, minds and spirits so we can turn around the love and forgiveness received from you and share this with others.

**CALL TO COMMUNION**

**LUYH # 691- Amazing Grace –**let us softly join our voices to sing vs. 1-3 during the passing of the bread and vs. 4, 5, and 1 again during the passing of the cup.