

Help where it's needed

Jo Jones *reflects on* Acts 16:16-34

I find many of the stories from Acts remote and rather bizarre. They are of voyages to towns I struggle to place on a map – tales of prisons, visions and earthquakes. Yet they are also stories to which I can relate – personalities gripped by fear or jealousy, or capable of great generosity. They include details that bring the people in them, met so briefly, to life. Vitally, they show how the first Christians witnessed to their faith.

Today we hear how Paul and Silas were followed in Philippi by a slave girl possessed by a spirit. Her owners were making lots of money out of her. Paul dismisses the spirit and they lose their easy income. Furious, they have Paul

and Silas thrown into prison. A huge earthquake opens the doors, but Paul and Silas do not take the opportunity to escape. This saves the terrified jailer, whose life depends on guarding the prisoners.

Pare this story down to its principles and we have a message for our time. Paul does not make friends with those who make money out of those who are less powerful. Instead, he frees the girl and saves the jailer, who recognises that these two men have something special, and believes. Our challenge is to live these stories for ourselves – to live according not to the world's rules but those that arise out of the love of God. 🍷



Lord, in the midst of the pressures of our lives, help us to stand fast to what we believe, act for those who are powerless and witness to the extraordinary power and depth of your love for your people. Amen.

The books of the Old Testament

1 Samuel

by Trevor Dennis

Trevor Dennis takes the baton and continues our series about the books of the Old Testament.

1 and 2 Samuel, contain some of the finest storytelling in the Bible. It would be better, perhaps, to call them 1 and 2 David, because, even though he doesn't appear until 1 Samuel 16, he is undoubtedly the central character.

At the time of Samuel, the enemies of the ancient Israelites are the Philistines, from the southwestern coastal strip of Canaan. The Israelites demand a

king to come to their rescue. God points Samuel in Saul's direction, and he duly anoints him Israel's first king. But Israel is not like other nations. "They have rejected me from being king over them," God tells Samuel. When Saul falls out of God's favour the way is open for David – or would be, had Samuel not anointed him king while Saul was still on the throne. David spends the final chapters of the book on the run from Saul. Those closing chapters tell of the friendship between David and Saul's son Jonathan.

Trevor Dennis is an Anglican priest, author, teacher and scripture scholar. 🍷

The Martyrs of Uganda

by Patsy McGregor

On Friday the Church commemorates the Uganda Martyrs – a group of forty-five Anglican and Catholic converts to Christianity who were executed in the 1880s – killed on the orders of the king because of the religious struggle for political influence.

Martyrdom – who likes to talk about that? And yet generations of martyrs have displayed

willingness to suffer death rather than renounce their religious beliefs. As Revelation 12:11 says: "They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death."

It makes me think – are there modern-day Christians willing to make such sacrifices? Am I willing? Having the heart of a martyr begins with small things – giving up our own will, wants, selfishness for the sake of the Gospel because "if we endure, we will also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12). 🍷

“If you plan to build a high house of virtues, you must first lay deep foundations of humility.”

St Augustine (AD 354-430), theologian, philosopher and bishop