

Syzygus Remembers

Acts 16:11-40; Philippians 3:3

What's that you say? You've never heard of me?
I'm not surprised—my name is usually kept
a secret. You ask why that may be?
Well Paul, the great apostle—not inept
in use of words—thought 'Yokefellow' would do
and so 'Yokefellow' I became.
I thought it fun to take on something new
and learn to answer to a different name.

When Paul first came to Philippi he found
a women's group who prayed at River's side—
not quite the strategy to draw a crowd—
a psychic slave girl turned the public tide.
'These men are servants of the Most High God!'
she shouted loud for everyone to hear.
A python spirit, sinister and odd,
possessed her mind and filled her life with fear.
Paul cast it out. Her owners in a furore
dragged the apostles to the magistrate:
'These men attack our culture and our law!'
'A whipping' said the Mayor, 'is their fate.'

In prison later, bloodied but not bowed,
their bodies flayed, their legs stretched into stocks,
at midnight hour they prayed and sang aloud.
The prisoners listened—then an earthquake shock
threw open all the doors and snapped the chains.
The gaoler thought his final days were near;
his inmates on the run like outlawed Cain.
But Paul cried out, 'Don't worry! We all are here!'

Soon all the gaoler's family and friends
were gathered in his house to hear Paul speak
and tell them from beginning to the end
how to be saved through Jesus Christ the Meek
who gave his life to rescue us from sin,
no matter who we are or what we've done.
And they were all baptised and followed him—
father, mother, servants, daughters, sons.

And so a church was born in Lydia's house
where I, too, came to know the risen Christ.

We had a faith no tyranny could dowse,
but still we needed godly, wise advice.

Dear Paul was now a prisoner in Rome
(for heinous crimes like bringing news of hope!)
He sent a letter sweet as honeycomb,
Enlivening as aromatic soap.
He wrote of faith and joy and answered prayer,
of unity, humility and love
and most of all of Christ who did not care
to seize equality with God above
but emptied his deific attributes
and took the form of human pain and loss,
became a slave in shame and disrepute
and wore our sins upon a Roman cross.

So God has now exalted him beyond
all other names that ever could be dreamed
that every knee should bow, both free and bond,
and every tongue confess he is supreme.

‘To me to live is Christ,’ wrote Paul, ‘and death
is only gain compared with earthly wealth.
I do not fear to take my dying breath
or choose my Lord before my fragile self.’
The longing of his heart was simply this:
to know Christ and his resurrection power,
the fellowship of suffering with him
and likeness to him in his dying hour.
‘All things I count,’ he said, ‘as stinking mess
in contrast with the all-surpassing worth
of knowing Christ who gives me righteousness
and liberates my soul from things of earth.’

Well, age has sorely weakened ear and eye:
the years have etched my flesh indelibly;
but still my soul is yoked to Christ and I
can do all things through him who strengthens me.

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