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April 2001

A Prayer for an Earthquake

Luke 4:16-19 and Acts 16:16-34

by Stan Saunders

This story of Paul and Silas in Philippi is a wonderful tale of faithful witness, bold preaching, resistance to the powers, and, finally, deliverance. What we may sometimes miss amidst our usual focus on Paul's faith and the jailer's conversion is the way this story unpacks the realities of life in the Roman empire—an empire rooted in practices of domination and exploitation. A slave girl, possessed by an evil spirit that allows her to predict the future, is being exploited by her owners. When Paul exorcises the demon, her owners drag Paul and Silas before the authorities. The officials have them stripped, whipped, beaten, and thrown into the stocks. Never mind a trial; they are clearly guilty of disturbing the economic order of the city. Remember, this is Philippi, where the power of Rome is celebrated and enforced. The Philippian prison is a tool of those who dominate this economic order, not a place to keep those who might actually pose a physical threat to the citizenry. The justice system, in other words, props up a system of domination, exploitation, and fear that extends even to the jailer himself.

Sound familiar? It should. But in case it doesn't, let me share a few facts about our own justice system, and especially about our prison system, the hottest ticket going in the new economy. During the last three decades, while our rate of violent crime has dropped by about twenty percent, our rate of incarceration per capita has more than quadrupled. During the past two decades roughly a thousand new jails and prisons have been built in this country, but America's prisons are more crowded than ever, and inmate population continues to increase by 50,000 to 80,000 per year. The United States

now imprisons more people than any other country in the world, perhaps as many as half a million more than Communist China, whose population dwarfs our own. As one observer has put it, "We have embarked on a great

labor. IBM, Motorola, Compaq, Texas Instruments, Honeywell, Microsoft, and Boeing all use prison labor in the production and packaging of their products. Chevron, TWA, and Victoria's Secret have used prison labor for data entry, to book flights, and to make lingerie at twenty-three cents an hour.

And who are the subjects of this exploitation? Predominantly

social experiment. No other society in human history has ever imprisoned so many of its own citizens for the purpose of crime control."

Or, we should add, for the purpose of economic exploitation. In the move to downsize government and put our trust ever more in the free market, we are turning to privately run prisons, or prisons for profit, which now generate thirty to forty billion dollars of revenue annually. The corrections industry segment of our economy today employs over a half million full time workers, more than any Fortune 500 company except General Motors. Most of us are implicated in this aspect of our economic boom more than we might expect, especially if we have investments in mutual funds. Goldman Sachs, Prudential, Smith Barney Sherson, Merrill Lynch, and others underwrite the construction bonds. Westinghouse and 3M adapt and sell their technological prowess. American Express and GE are invested directly in for-profit prisons in Texas. Others profit from the cheap

"minorities," as you might suspect, especially those left behind in the abandonment of our inner cities. In addition to the genuinely violent (a shrinking percentage of the prison population), America's inmate population now consists primarily of the poor, the homeless, the mentally ill, drug addicts, and alcoholics—anyone left behind by the educational and economic systems. Seventy percent of prison inmates are functionally illiterate. Forty-five percent of state inmates were unemployed at the time of their arrest. The vast majority of the rest were making less than \$10,000 a year. But still the most striking aspect of our prison system is its inescapable racial bias. Between fifty and sixty percent of the inmates in the US are black. The prevalence of illegal drug use is about the same among black men as it is among whites, but black men are

five times more likely to be arrested for drug offenses. One of every fourteen African-American men are now in prison or jail. One of every four African-American men is likely to be imprisoned sometime during his lifetime. Nationally, nearly one third of African-American males aged 20-29 are under court supervision. And in the nation's capital, fifty percent of African-American males aged 18-35 are under court supervision. But the fastest growing segment of the prison population is African-American women, of whom seventy percent are non-violent offenders, and seventy-five percent have children.

All of this is happening, by the way, for the sake of those of us who are already privileged, just as the jails of Philippi served the interests of the well-to-do. The logic of this system has recently been articulated in wondrous clarity by a New York educational administrator, cited in a recent article by Princeton Seminary's Mark Taylor. The administrator is speaking of Rikers Island, the world's largest penal institution, located across the East River from the Bronx. He says, "Without this island, the attractive lives some of us lead in the nice sections of New York would simply not be possible. If you want to get your outcasts out of sight, first you need a ghetto and then you need a prison to take pressure off the ghetto. . . . Short term terror and revulsion are more powerful than long term wisdom or self interest." If a segment of the population bothers you, in other words, they can be effectively "disappeared."

The warehousing and economic exploitation of primarily

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Hospitality

(continued from page 1)

African Americans is only part of the prison picture, however. During the 90's state and federal governments, succumbing to public pressure induced by the corporate sponsored media, began to adopt get-tough-on-crime measures. Funding for educational programs, the one factor in prison life that seemed consistently to help move people out of the prison system, was virtually eliminated. The energies of guards and officials now focus more on controlling an angry and potentially explosive inmate population. The techniques include better surveillance and more frequent use of daily violence, including stun guns. But two of the tools of corrections officials are less widely known. The first is a systematically organized and maintained culture of sexual exploitation and rape. The threat of rape is a primary reality for the domination and control of women in prison. In 1992, the regular and widespread sexual abuse of women in Georgia's state prisons received even the attention of the national press. While public advocacy occasionally brings reforms, the subtle and often overt threat is a daily reality for imprisoned women. Somewhere between 200,000 and 300,000 male inmates are raped each year, many of them daily. Sexual terror is simply a useful and efficient tool to divide and control the inmate population. The second element of divide and conquer control strategies is racial politics. Prison supervisors and guards routinely encourage and use ethnically oriented groups against each other. The white men who dragged James Byrd to death in Texas were "educated" in the prison system.

I could go on and on. As Eric Schlosser has noted in a 1998 article on the "prison industrial complex" in the *Atlantic Monthly*, "The spirit of every age is manifest in its public works, in the great construction projects that leave an enduring mark on the landscape." Our prison system is now leaving enduring marks not only on the geographic landscape, but on the souls of young men and women. And we are ripping at the last shreds of minority communities already stretched thin and tattered by earlier generations of racism and violence. Beyond that, we are staining ourselves with the blood and anger of those we imprison and execute. We may be sliding quietly into an abyss darker even than the holocaust.

Psalm 69:33 says that the Lord listens to

those in need and does not forget God's people in prison. Jesus, in Luke 4, announces the dawn of the Jubilee, when the oppressed will be set free and the prisoners released. I wonder: where will we in the churches be when the prisoners really are set free? I hope and I believe this really will happen, because I believe more in the promises of God and the power of the cross than I believe in the power of the state and the corporate giants. I believe that God hates the violence and degradation of our prisons. I believe that God hates to see some people imprison, exploit, and murder other human beings. And I believe that God is now present in our jails and prisons, standing with the innocent and with the guilty; standing with the least ones, weeping with the victims, enduring beatings and rapes, and promising to overcome.

In the Philippian prison, Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns of praise to God, who answered with an earthquake and shattered the

chains. The church has always been at its best when it enters the scarred and fearful places of life and gives witness—in prayer and praise—to the merciful and reconciling power of God. God's people—from Joseph, to Jesus, to Paul and Silas, to Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth and Fannie Lou Hamer, to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dorothy Day—have a long and rich tradition of witness and ministry in the prisons of the empires throughout history. And I believe today that God is calling us again to this place of abandoned souls. Lord, grant us eyes to see where you are working, cunning to bring down a corrupt system, and courage to put our bodies on the line. And let us pray for more earthquakes.

Stan Saunders teaches New Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary and is member of the Open Door's worshiping community. This sermon was preached at the Columbia chapel on January 23, 2001.

Selected Bibliography for Further Reading:

Eric Schlosser, "The Prison-Industrial Complex," *The Atlantic Monthly* (December 1998): 51-77.

A quick, wide-ranging exposé.

Mark Taylor, "The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (2000): 301-323.

Taylor has a book due out this year with the same title; an insightful look at the issues from a theological standpoint; suggests some strategies for engagement. Dependent on Parenti for much of his material on the prison system.

Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (Verso Books, 1999).

The most thoroughly researched discussion of the prison system industry that I am aware of. Traces the political and economic origins of the current trends, and looks carefully at the way prisons are shaping culture.

Joe Davidson, "Caged Cargo; African-Americans are grist for the fast-growing prison industry's money mill," *Emerge* (October 1997): 36-46.

Provides some of the names of companies invested in the Prison-Industrial complex; the source of many of the statistics used in the sermon.

Sasha Abramsky, "When They Get Out," *The Atlantic Monthly* (June 1999): 30-36.

Looks particularly at the question of the psychological effects of prison life, especially isolation, and wonders what will happen when the people incarcerated over the last couple of decades start to hit the streets again in large numbers ["wave after wave"] during the next few years.

HOSPITALITY



PHOTO BY GARY BECK

Open Door Community

Hospitality is published 11 times a year by the Open Door Community (PCUS), Inc., an Atlanta community of Christians called to ministry with the homeless poor and with prisoners, particularly those on death row. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard. For more information about the life and work of the Open Door, please contact any of the following:

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“Thou Shall Not Kill”

by Stephen Bright

(Editor's Note: Attorney Stephen Bright is the Director of the Southern Center for Human Rights located in Atlanta, Georgia. SCHR is a nonprofit, public interest human rights organization which focuses on the human rights of prisoners and those facing the death penalty in the South. The following article is from Bright's remarks on accepting an honorary doctorate from the University of Central England, Birmingham, February 15, 2001.)

“I just want to be there in love and justice and in truth and in commitment to others, so that we can make of this old world a new world.”
(Martin Luther King, Jr.)

In the area in which I work in the States, we still have a long way to go toward the “new world” of which King spoke. We are putting more and more people to death. Last year one state, Texas, carried out 40 executions. The new President of the United States presided over 152 executions during his six years as governor of that state. The courts of Texas and some other states have sacrificed any pretense of fairness in order to carry out executions.

Last month the American legal system offered a spectacle that may be hard to understand from this side of the Atlantic. Fourteen judges of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit—the level of courts second only to the Supreme Court—earnestly considered the issue of whether a death sentence can be carried out in a case in which the one lawyer appointed to defend the accused slept through much of the trial. A panel of three members of that court had previously concluded in a 2-1 opinion that sleeping did not violate the right to counsel. The two judges in the majority held that the record did not show that the lawyer slept through an important part of the trial. Of course, the person responsible for preparing the record was the lawyer. And he was asleep. The case is now being reconsidered by the entire Court.

An increasing number of voices, however, are expressing concern about the use of the death penalty in the United States. Many people—including many supporters of capital punishment—are appalled by the way in which people are processed in assembly-line fashion to the death chambers in states like Texas and Virginia.

There is growing concern that many innocent people have been sentenced to death. Three days ago, Virginia released Earl Washington, a mentally retarded man who had been sentenced to death and came within hours of execution in 1994 before the governor commuted his sentence to life imprisonment without any possibility of parole. DNA evidence has now conclusively shown that Washington was innocent, and he has been pardoned.

Earl Washington is the ninety-fifth person released from death rows in the last thirty years because

their innocence has been established. Others sentenced to death—like Earl Washington originally—have had death sentences commuted to life imprisonment because of doubts about their guilt. And some have been executed despite questions of their innocence.

The Governor of Illinois, George Ryan, declared just over a year ago a moratorium on executions in that state. Since Illinois reinstated the death penalty in 1977, thirteen people sentenced to death have been exonerated, and twelve have been executed. The innocence of three of those exonerated was established by a journalism class at Northwestern University.

Some people have said that the fact that ninety-five innocent people have been released from death row shows that the United States legal system works. However, someone spending sixteen years on death row for a crime he did not commit is not an example of the system working. When undergraduate journalism students prove that police, prosecutors, judges, defense lawyers, and the entire legal system did not discover this man's innocence and instead condemned him to die, it is clear that the system is not working.

These cases have prompted closer examination of the legal system in the States. Those who have looked closely have been shocked by the poor quality of legal representation provided poor people facing the death penalty, by the extent to which race influences who is sentenced to death, and by the improper practices of police and prosecutors, such as obtaining favorable testimony from criminals against those facing death by giving them lenient treatment. Many people are troubled by the execution of people who are mentally retarded, mentally ill, or children at the times of their crimes.

I hope that in the coming years—with your help—we will continue to examine these questions. I hope that we will also address larger questions, such as what kind of society do we want to have, and whether we are willing to recognize the dignity of every person, even those who have offended us most grievously.

The Constitutional Court of South Africa addressed these questions in deciding that the death penalty violated that country's constitution. The Court unanimously concluded that in a society in transition from hatred to understanding, from vengeance to reconciliation, there was no place for the death penalty.

If we in the United States continue to examine our system, face its flaws, consider what kind of society we want to have, and listen to all those around the world who can teach us so much about human rights, we will ultimately conclude that we should join Europe and so much of the civilized world in making permanent, absolute, and unequivocal the injunction “Thou Shall Not Kill.”

Death Penalty Facts

European Union Stance on the Death Penalty Angers Bush

Administration: The London telegraph reports that the European Union's criticism of the U.S. for ignoring “human rights norms” in its refusal to abolish the death penalty has angered the Bush Administration. “We don't believe there is reason to start a major row on this across the Atlantic,” said Willy Helin, spokesman for the EU in Washington. “We just don't believe the death penalty is a sufficient deterrent.” Helin stated that the EU was opposed to the death penalty in principle but particularly in cases involving juvenile offenders, those with mental retardation, or foreign nationals.

(UK London Telegraph, 3/8/01)

Texas Carries Out 700th U.S. Execution Since Reinstatement of the Death Penalty

Penalty: The March 7th execution of Dennis Dowthitt in Texas marks the 700th execution in the U.S. since the death penalty was reinstated. Over 80% of those executions occurred in the South, and 326 of the 700 (46%) were carried out in Texas and Virginia alone.

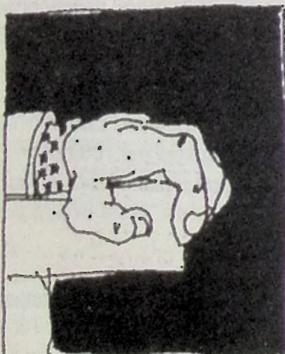
Georgia Supreme Court Halts Electric Chair Execution

Chair: The Georgia Supreme Court granted a stay to Ronald Spivey until the court decides whether use of the electric chair constitutes “cruel and unusual punishment.” Georgia has not used its electric chair since 1998. The state has since passed legislation to change its method of execution to lethal injection, but the statute only applies to those sentenced after May 1, 2000. In a concurring opinion issued just four hours before Spivey's execution, Justice Sears noted that the Legislature changed the method of execution to lethal injection because electrocution “offends the evolving standards of decency that characterize a mature, civilized society.”

(Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 3/6/01)

Conclusion. As executions remain at a high level, concerns about the death penalty continue to grow. With the exception of politicians, U.S. leaders in the fields of religion, human rights, the law, and diplomacy are increasingly voicing their opposition to the way the death penalty is applied in this country. The execution of juveniles and the mentally retarded, executions that damage U.S. standing in the international community and executions of those who have dramatically turned their lives around, together with the ever-present chance of mistaken executions, have led more and more people to protest the continued use of the death penalty. New voices of criticism, including those of respected appellate judges, former attorneys general, and institutions which formerly supported the death penalty, are being heard as the persistent arbitrariness and unfairness of capital punishment become ever more apparent.

Source: Death Penalty Information Center, 1320 18th St. NW, 5th fl., Washington, DC 20036. <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org>



NO MORE AUCTION BLOCK

by Murphy Davis

Sweet Honey in the Rock lifted their voices,
"No more auction block for me;
no more, no more.
No more auction block for me!
Many thousand gone."

One voice sang it with melodic strength. Another belted it. A third growled it: No more, NO, NO, NO, NO more!" The whole community was there in the Spelman College Sisters Chapel for the annual concert. We sat on the edge of our seats hearing a song we had heard many times before. But it seemed to carry new tones of urgency. Chattel slavery seems long ago and far away for people who wear white skin, access to privilege, or other forms of denial. Living close to the homeless poor and prisoners makes it painfully clear that some expressions of slavery have never really gone away, and that the current political agenda strengthens the grip of the overseer.

A few days later, several of us were in a legislative hearing on the use of private prisons in our state. Two "spec" prisons were recently built in South Georgia. That is to say, the Corrections Corporation of America, a Nashville based for-profit corporation, built two prisons in small rural communities that were not asked for by the Georgia Department of Corrections or any other prison system. They believed, as they say, that "if we build it, they will come," the prisoners, that is. As it turned out, the Georgia authorities did not want to contract for these prisons. So the corporate planners started exploring other options. They are currently trying to negotiate shipping prisoners in from Hawaii to fill their prison as quickly as possible.

It was amazing to sit and listen to the various pleas and explanations of why importing prisoners for corporate profit was a good and necessary thing. Prison was referred to as a "nice clean industry," an environmentally friendly facility that would provide needed jobs and development for these strangling rural communities. The argument made again and again was, "This is at its base, an economic issue and nothing else." If you hadn't known that they were talking about human beings, you might have thought the discussion was about importing cattle. In fact, more concerns and health regulations would have been raised about importing cattle than we heard in the discussion about importing captive humans.

But no, the conversation was about the continuation of the legal form of slavery that has remained an option in the American political system. When the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed, there was an enormous battle over the wording. Abolitionist lawmakers wanted to make it short and simple. "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude." Period. But the interests of the former slaveholders prevailed. The 13th Amendment reads, "...Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude except as punishment for crime...." (my

emphasis). Penal slavery in the United States of America is and has been, legal. In the decades following the Civil War, the infamously cruel convict-lease system was developed to replace the emancipated work force on many southern plantations, mills, turpentine camps, and industries.

The system treated convicts not as human beings in need of "correction" or restoration, but as objects to meet the needs of private entrepreneurs. In fact, many of the laws under which captives were convicted were manufactured—"Black codes"—for the purpose of creating a large prison population that would work, in turn, to the benefit of

private interests. The excesses of the convict lease system finally brought such public revulsion that Georgia and other southern states finally abolished it.

"Deja vu all over again," as Yogi Berra would say. The discussion before the legislative committee spoke of the economic needs of the community and "fairness" to the corporation which had invested in the possibility of "providing jobs and a public service." There

was no mention of the experience of the imprisoned, or question of who they might be or why they might be there; there seemed to be no curiosity about their families or how in the world family and friends thousands of miles away might visit someone from Hawaii in McRae, Georgia. (It was clear that the motel and restaurants in town were interested in their business if the family members or lawyers did manage to get there.) And there were certainly no questions about how we have come to the point in our national life that prisons are an "industry" rather than a last resort for responding to the brokenness among us. The Biblical understanding of crime as a matter of individual responsibility and as a sign of the need for the community to seek forgiveness and healing might not be the most frequent sermon topic in town.

However you want to dress it up, the traffic of captive human beings for the purpose of private profit is slavery. The interests of the Prison Industrial Complex and its minions of the press would have us see these issues in one-dimensional terms of economic development. We must insist on calling it by its true name. To build a future for our communities on the practice of human bondage is to collaborate in the design of disaster. To attempt to "save" ourselves and our communities by creating jobs for growing numbers of overseers and keepers to hold neighbors in cages is to "sow the seeds of injustice and reap the whirlwind."

We do, in fact, need to hear the desperate cries of small towns and rural communities strangling as their livelihood in farming and small community-owned businesses evaporate. Economic assistance is, in fact, needed for schools, health care centers and public institutions. And we have to re-develop ways for people to support themselves in

small communities. But the corporate interests that have created forces to make life in these communities untenable are the same forces that now present private prisons as the answer to economic desperation. Though crime has decreased dramatically in recent years, the incarceration rate has continued to grow as we dance to the tune of manipulative politicians and a corporate media that sensationalizes crime to keep fear alive and well. What will happen when we finally come to our senses and decide give up our record as the world's leading jailer? What will happen when tens of thousands of men, women and children who have spent endless years in private dungeons with little or no incentive or opportunity for education or training are dumped back onto the streets of their communities to fend for themselves? What will happen when the private interests that dictate cutting back on health care for their captives contribute to the spread of contagious disease among us? Who will then pick of the pieces? What will our children and grandchildren think as they look back in horror at our passive acceptance of penal slavery and its destruction of human dignity and community? How will we atone for once again placing the lives of our sisters and brothers on the auction block?

Sing it now. Sing it loud. And keep singing it: No more auction block for me. No more auction block for you. No more auction block for any child of God!

Murphy Davis is a partner at the Open Door Community and the Director of Southern Prison Ministry in Georgia.

The Growing Prison System

- ◆ The number of inmates under the jurisdiction of state and federal prisons has increased more than six-fold from less than 200,000 in 1970 to 1,366,700 by 1999. An additional 605,900 are held in local jails.
- ◆ The number of persons on probation and parole has been growing dramatically along with institutional populations. There are now 6.3 million Americans incarcerated or on probation, or parole, an increase of 242 percent since 1980.
- ◆ Almost one in three (32%) young black males in the age group 20-29 is under some type of correctional control (incarceration, probation or parole) as is 1 in 15 young white males and 1 in 8 young Hispanic males.
- ◆ In fiscal year 1995, state and federal governments planned \$5.1 billion in new prison construction, at an average cost of \$58,000 for a medium security cell.
- ◆ The 1999 United States' rate of incarceration of 690 inmates per 100,000 population is the highest reported rate in the world, now ahead of Russia's rate of 675 per 100,000.

*Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Corrections Compendium*, and The Sentencing Project. 10/2000*

Meeting John the Baptist for the First Time

by Ed Loring

Hello. My name is Thaddaeus. I was a disciple of both of them. Still am in many ways. I sit now in this dark damp dungeon with two others. We were caught trying to tear the Temple down with our bare hands. Caiaphas wants us crucified; Pilate thinks he has a point this time. Pitiful the religion that wants the government to do its dirty work.

Long ago now, my sister, Marian, and I were walking from Bathabara to Capernaum, a small town about the size of Bamberg, South Carolina. We were in the desert, and we were afraid. Suddenly, we heard the most hideous racket—like drunk ravens and blue jays having a feast with a lion! Marian turned to run, but I grabbed her robe. We hid behind the large scattered rocks.

Behind the cacophony walked a small band

of men and women—occasionally a ball of fire would fly over their heads and explode in the heavens. At first, we thought it was a group of rich folk from Nain heading to one of the infamous masquerade parties of Herod Antipas in Tiberius—what outfits! But then to our astonishment we heard the man in the middle of the band yelling at the top of his voice: "Turn away from your allegiances to Rome and the Temple sacrifices. Be ye baptized! God will forgive your sins!"

"Marian, Marian," I whispered, "what good news this is, especially for us poor. Who in the world can this man be?"

"I am 'the voice of someone shouting in the desert: Make a straight path for Yahweh-Elohim to travel!'"

"Thaddaeus," said my twin, "That is Elijah the Prophet! Our new exodus is at hand!! That's why they are dressed so funny. Remember what Mama taught us? 'But before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes, I will send you the prophet Elijah. Otherwise I would have to come and destroy your country!! (As I destroyed the Confederate States of America for their slave holding.)' And here is Elijah quoting Isaiah—the whole prophetic tradition is coming alive again!"

The little band stopped, made a circle, and held hands. Their song leader, Martha, was a bit resistant to another circle-in-the-desert song and prayer time, but the wild man with deep and tender eyes was a demanding sort. So Martha led this song:

Sowing on the mountain, reaping in the valley
Sowing on the mountain, reaping in the valley
Sowing on the mountain, reaping in the valley
You gonna reap just what you sow.

God gave Noah the rainbow sign
God gave Noah the rainbow sign
God gave Noah the rainbow sign
Said: Won't be water, but fire next time.

Won't be water, but fire next time
Won't be water, but fire next time
Won't be water, but fire next time
God gave Noah the rainbow sign.

Where you gonna run to when the world's on fire?
Where you gonna run to when the world's on fire?
Where you gonna run to when the world's on fire?
You gonna reap just what you sow!

"Oh Thaddeus, let's go get baptized with water right now! A baptism of fire will hurt like hell."

"Okay," I whispered, not yet fully finding my voice. "Plus, I really like those costumes. Come on, let's go."

That's how we met him. We joined the band. That was in 28 C.E. See my scars? These hands? I cannot open them. I took the fire many years after my John (whose name means 'God is gracious') had his head hacked off with an ax. The handle of the first ax broke. Some called him stiff-necked.

Ed Loring is a partner at the Open Door Community.

The Well, Revisited

by toni kathleen flynn

In my dream
she returns to the well.
I too am there.
I know her name.
She knows mine.
We talk
of husbands,
broken hearts,
loneliness, shame,

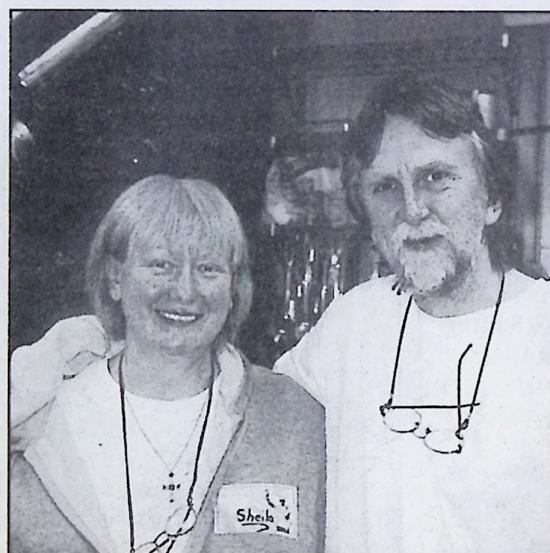
and water jars.
She tells me about Jesus
and how all deep conversions
begin with a deep thirst
and a moment of truth.

Before daybreak
she runs away to tell the others
as is her fashion.
I want to go with her
but instead, I awaken to the
smell of morning coffee
and the intrusion of
my alarm clock
clanging.

Should I rise or lie still?
I can't be sure.
Time is moving backward
and forward
like hands moving in conversation, like water
lapping in Jacob's well, like
the sound of Jesus' voice at high noon, announcing
liberation.

Attention all women (and men)
who have ever known
the terrible hollows
of rejection ...
here you can rest
and drink water.

Editor's note: Toni Flynn is the founder of the High Desert Catholic Worker in Valyermo, California where she lives and works



MURPHY DAVIS

Sheila and Keith Lyle are our newest resident volunteers. They have come to us from Scotland and plan to stay for the next 6 months. They are Associate members of the Iona Community.

When they applied for their visas, they requested a 1-year stay but for reasons unknown they were granted a 10 year visa. You too can join us for a mysterious amount of time... anywhere from 6 months to 10 years.

- Serve Jesus Christ and the hungry, homeless and prisoners.

- Bible study and theological reflections from the Base.

- Street actions and peaceful demonstrations.

*Spend 6 to 12 months as a
Resident Volunteer*

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Covenant Presbyterian Church and the Confederate Flag

by Ed Loring

The Body of Christ at the margins of the mainstream and those people captured in the spiritual famine that wrecks starvation and death upon this land cry out in anguish and hope: "Let the Church be the Church!! Stop this god awful crossless Christianity!"

Well, this day we have *good news for the poor*, and good news for us—disciples of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Someone took a large stone, about the size used to stone Stephen to death, and hurled it with hate through the stained glass window at Covenant Presbyterian Church on Peachtree Road in Atlanta. The window was shattered. The hurling stone reminds us of the insults that were screamed at Jesus while he hung dying on the cross.

We are deeply thankful to our God, Yahweh-Elohim, the God of Exodus, for this stone and the deep gash in the window as though it were the body of one of our friends on the streets or in prison. We are thankful to the Peachtree Corridor Congregations and Synagogues who had decided to lead the state in a symbolic act of inclusion and liberation by working to remove the racist and slavery-glorying flag that honored Proslavery Christians and the Confederate rebellion against the United States of America. These faith communities, who fly no flags (God be praised), placed in their front yards the pre-1956 Georgia State flag (with no racist and Confederate symbols). *This was done before the state legislature voted for the new flag.* Thanks be to Yahweh-Elohim, Jesus Christ, and the loving power of our fiery Holy

Spirit for this prophetic action and faithful demonstration of the power of the Gospel in the lives of disciples, Jews, churches, and synagogues in the Peachtree Corridor.

Why are we so thankful that someone brought the fury of racism and another dying gasp of the too-long-lived lies of Dixieland to the body of Covenant Presbyterian Church?

Because the Church is not the Church unless it knows in its life the pain of persecution (Mark 10:29-31). The cry from the margins that the church be the church, which we hear in our front yard, has been put into practice by the Rev. Steve Goyer and Covenant Presbyterian Church. When the demons are truthfully named and unmasked they not only scream; they turn to violence. Reverend Goyer, in addition to his sermons on the flag, also

television, and he spoke the truth of God all across this state. The demons who nest amidst the fetid fecal-filled viscera of the Old Confederacy could but call their troops to action. Thank you, Covenant Presbyterian Church, for being the Church for those on the margins as you live close to the center. We need your witness like the starving need bread. Thank you, Steve Goyer, for your courage and public proclamation of the Gospel. You are a true TV evangelist.

Had Covenant employed Temple Guards (perhaps even without guns), which, Praise be to Yahweh-Elohim, they do not, the son or daughter of Robert E. Lee might not have gotten close enough to the church to hurl the stone through the stained glass window. Had the window not been broken, the witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ would not have been made visible and public across the state of Georgia. So beware! The task of Temple Guards has not changed one iota since Caiaphas sent them for Jesus Christ: keep the Word of God and the practice of discipleship away so we can be happy, crossless Christians.

Looking for a church home? Visit Covenant Presbyterian Church.

Ed Loring is a partner at the Open Door Community.



went public—outside the safety of a stone sanctuary and into the streets. He was interviewed on

Subscriptions??

If you have found *Hospitality* helpful and would like to know more about the Open Door Community, please fill out, clip and send this form to:

The Open Door Community
910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE
Atlanta, GA 30306-4212.

Please ADD to the *Hospitality* mailing list.
 Please accept my tax deductible donation to the Open Door Community.
 I'm interested in volunteering. Please give me more information.
 I would like to explore a six to twelve-month commitment as a Resident Volunteer at the Open Door. Please send more information.

(or see www.opendoorcommunity.org for more info)

Name _____

Address _____

In The Spotlight

Rachel Chmiel and Tim Saviello



by Tonnie King

Ron Spivey was scheduled to be executed by the state of Georgia on March 6, 2001. As we all know, when an execution is scheduled, it takes a lot of hard work to try to prevent it.

Please meet Rachel Chmiel and her husband Tim Saviello who have dedicated their lives to work against the Death Penalty. Rachel works at the Georgia Appellate Resource Center and Tim at the office of the Federal Public Defender.

Along with their wonderful talents as defense lawyers, they are both regular volunteers for the Tuesday morning breakfast at the Open Door Community. They are continuing a family tradition as Open Door volunteers begun by Rachel's parents, Darla and Ron, who began to volunteer with us when Rachel was 12 years old!

Three cheers for the grace-filled work of Rachel and Tim!

Do you have a vehicle to donate?



All of the Open Door cars have well over 100,000 miles, and upkeep is becoming very costly!

Please call us:
404-874-9652

Dear Murphy,

Quite simply, it is impossible for me to articulate the profound impact of Hannah's article. Her deep sense of tranquility and wide range of understanding came to life in these lines.

What Hannah said is important; but, how she communicated it is of greater value. There is an ease of development, the truth of humility, and the confidence of faith.

Yes, your and Ed's influences are apparent; but, her uniqueness is equally clear. This sum may well be more than the individual parts.

You have been privileged to witness her growth so this probably is not that astonishing to you. Hannah is a powerful ambassador for Christ and The Open Door Community.

May God continue to bless.

Peace,

A friend on Death Row

Dear Nibs Stroupe,

It was with great interest that I read your article about Barbara Johns in the current issue of *Hospitality*. I've read other articles of yours in Open Door's newsletter and relished them, but this had special significance for me. In the summer of 1962 my first husband, Harry Boyte (who died in 1977) and I were in Prince Edward County with the American Friends Service Committee, living in the upstairs apartment of Dr. Miller, a local dentist, and his wife.

AFSC had a project in Prince Edward County of finding places in northern states where black high school students could transfer after the County closed its schools following the 1954 Supreme Court decision. Although Virginia in general resisted the decision, I believe you will find that Prince Edward County was the only one that actually closed its public schools rather than desegregate them. That summer a number of college students, mostly from northern schools, came down to Farmville to tutor children whose schools were closed. Much of our work involved finding places for them to live—always with black families, of course—and churches where they could hold informal classes.

It was a very intense and troubling experience. One Sunday morning we looked across the street and saw a swastika painted on the opposite fence. When I went for walks in the evening, no white resident of Farmville would speak to me. I well remember Rev. Griffin, the pastor of the First Baptist Church, as he and Harry became good friends and he sometimes visited us in the evening. Harry was there longer than I, as he had gone down early in the year, and had interviews with all the local political and civic leaders. Those would be a very interesting source of information if one obtained them from the AFSC office in Philadelphia, as these men often were secretly dismayed by what had happened in their county. My chief recollection is of the kindness and hospitality of the black citizens in the community, and of attending gatherings in their churches and singing freedom songs together.

Although I have these recollections of Prince Edward, and may very well have met Mary Croner and Sally Johns, and even Barbara, I don't recall names. So I was delighted to learn more about the high school students whose crusading efforts led to the famous *Brown vs. the Board of Education* case.

I now live in East Lake Commons, a cohousing community off Second Ave. in Decatur, and often pass your church on the way to our Friends Meeting, of which I am a member.

Sincerely,
Janet Ferguson
Decatur, Georgia

Dear Nibs:

I write both grateful and ashamed. Grateful for the story I just learned from your Open Door article and ashamed that I had to learn it from you at 84 years of age and supposedly an astute Black leader. Somehow I had missed part of the Brown vs Topeka story and I thank you for it.

I have been aware of a sense of dissatisfaction and I realize that it is because I have no involvements here yet. I have joined the

NAACP but there has been no meeting since. There are some justice activities in the presbytery that offer some openings.

I will be in Atlanta to lead a workshop in the TAMPS conference in late March.

Greetings to the wife and congregation.

Sincerely,
Clinton M. Marsh
Blacksburg, Virginia

(Dr. Marsh is a former moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly and has served on the Open Door's Advisory Board.)

Dear Ed and Murphy,

I am remembering you all in my prayers, and still talking about you—all aspects of life at 910—and enthusing about my time there.

I was at the WCC's Central Committee meeting in Berlin (really at Potsdam, 30 km outside) for 10 days recently—a great opportunity for developing contacts and affirming solidarity around issues of peace and justice. The WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence was launched at a fine service in a church in the centre of Berlin rebuilt after bombing, followed by a candlelit procession to the Brandenburg gate. In "violence" of course is included racism, the structural violence that causes poverty and homelessness as well as physical violence—which would of course cover the death penalty.

At the start of this week I was involved in a big anti-nuclear demonstration at the Trident submarine base 30 miles from Glasgow where all Britain's weapons are located. There were 1000 or so people there and 385 were arrested, including 22 members of the Iona Community and 18 ministers (some people—I myself—in both categories). We managed to get a lot of publicity by getting all the Scottish church leaders (except a Roman Catholic unfortunately) to come and take part in the last of 3 acts of worship we held. We gathered at 7 am and most of those of us who were arrested were "lifted" around 11 am. I was released at 10:30 pm (but some were held till 4 am) just in time for a live television interview in a network current affairs programme. The media interest was huge, largely because of the "significant" church involvement—altogether a satisfactory event, if rather an ordeal.

Yours,
Norman Shanks
Iona Community
Glasgow, Scotland

Dear Ed,

I always sit when opening mail, but I was caught standing by the compelling title, "Stranger at the Table" (January *Hospitality*), and the insightful, eloquent sermon by Hannah Loring-Davis... The last two paragraphs had the effect of the Hallelujah Chorus in Handle's *MESSIAH*. I remained standing. Hat's Off to Hannah!

It was a double-header. I refer to THE DEFECT-

IVE BODY, by Assistant Professor of New Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary. His analysis and application of Blind Bartemaeus, defect, defector, and defective is stunning.

For all defectors and defective bodies, beginning with Stanley, Brenda, Carson, and Aja, Thanks be to God.

Hugh Carter
Gulf Breeze, Florida

Holy Week with the Homeless

We invite you to join us for worship and/or a 24-hour period of solidarity with our friends on the street during

Holy Week.

Services of
Worship:
(April 8-15)

PALM SUNDAY

Open Door Community, 5 p.m.

MONDAY

Grady Hospital, Butler St., 5pm

TUESDAY

City Jail, Peachtree St., 5pm

WEDNESDAY

Woodruff Park, 5pm

MAUNDY THURSDAY

City Hall, Trinity Ave., 5pm

(with celebration of the eucharist)

GOOD FRIDAY

State Capitol, Washington St., 5pm

HOLY SATURDAY

Pine St. Shelter at

Peachtree and Pine, 5pm

EASTER MORNING

Open Door Community, 7:30 am

Celebration of the Resurrection and breakfast with our homeless friends.

Open Door Community Ministries

Soup Kitchen: Wednesday – Friday, 11 a.m. – noon

Sunday Breakfast: 7:30 a.m.

Weekday Breakfast: Monday – Wednesday, 6:45 a.m.

Use of Phone: Monday – Tuesday, 6:45 a.m. – 7:45 a.m.,
Wednesday – Friday, 9 a.m. – noon

Harriet Tubman Free Medical Clinic and Soul Foot Care Clinic: Thursdays, 7:30 p.m.

Clarification Meetings: Selected Tuesdays, 7:30 – 9 p.m.

Weekend Retreats: Four times each year (for our household, volunteers and supporters); next retreat is our Spring Retreat April 27 - 29.

Our Hospitality Ministries include visitation and letter writing to prisoners, anti-death penalty advocacy, advocacy for the homeless, daily worship and weekly Eucharist.

We are open...

Monday through Saturday: We answer telephones from 9:00 a.m. until noon, from 2:00 until 6:00 p.m. The building is open from 9:00 a.m. until 8:30 p.m. those days. (We do not answer phone and door during our noon prayers and lunch break from 12:30 until 2:00). Please call in advance if you need to arrange to come at other times. On Sunday we invite you to worship with us at 5 p.m. and join us following worship for a delicious supper.

Come Worship With Us!

We gather for worship and Eucharist on Sunday evenings followed by supper together.

April 1	5 p.m. Worship at 910;
April 8	5 p.m. Worship at 910; Palm Sunday and Commissioning to Holy Week with the Homeless.* Nibs Stroupe preaching.
April 15	7:30 am Breakfast with the Homeless and celebration of the Resurrection. (No Evening Worship)
April 22	5 p.m. Worship at 910;
April 27-29	Spring Retreat at Dayspring Farm. (No Worship at 910)

Please join us!

*See schedule for Holy Week Worship on page 7.

Dr. Charles Campbell and Dr. Eduard Loring hold street preaching services at 11a.m. on most Wednesdays and in many places in downtown Atlanta. Also, front yard Worship every Wednesday morning at 8:30 at 910. Led by Chuck Campbell, the Homeless, and the Breakfast servers.

Volunteer Needs

- ◆ Soup Kitchen servers on Wednesday (9:30a.m.-12:30p.m.)
- ◆ Groups to make sandwiches for Soup Kitchen
- ◆ People to cook or bring supper for the Community On Mondays, Tuesdays or Thursdays.

If you have a special interest or gift you would like to share as a volunteer, call Phil Leonard at 404-874-4906, or email him at pleon2000@minspring.com

Medical Supplies

(for our Thursday Evening Harriet Tubman Free Medical Clinic)

Can you help with the medicine cabinet?

- aspirin
- Tylenol
- bandages and band-aids
- antibiotic cream or ointment
- Ibuprofen
- antifungal cream
- cold medicine (alcohol free)

Open Door Community Needs

JEANS
T-Shirts
Men's Work Shirts
Quick Grits
Cheese
Coffee
Multi-Vitamins
MARTA Tokens
Postage Stamps
Underwear for Men
Men's Shoes (all sizes)

Meat for the soup in our Soup Kitchen
Sandwiches
Table Lamps
Floor Lamps
Chest of Drawers
Vacuum Cleaners
Twin Beds
Alarm Clocks
Blankets
Eye Glasses

Disposable Razors
Women's Underwear
Toothbrushes
Deodorant
Vaseline
Towels
Socks
Shampoo
Men's Belts
Washcloths

From 11am 'til 1:30pm, Monday through Saturday, our attention is focused on serving the soup kitchen and household lunch. As much as we appreciate

your coming, this is a difficult time for us to receive donations. When you can come before 11 or after 1:30, it would be helpful. THANK YOU!