

Acts 16:25-34  
Dancing in the Dark  
WRCoB 8.5.18

From the Associated Press

*Stranded in Mountain Snow, Woman Dances for Her Life*

LAYTON, Utah — *When Karen Hartley found herself stranded in freezing temperatures and mountain snow as night fell, she knew it was either dance or die.*

*So she danced in the dark by herself, playing remembered tunes in her head until dawn, when rescuers spotted her from a search helicopter. She was unhurt and spent Christmas Day in a hot tub, followed by dinner at Denny's.*

*Hartley, a 33-year-old computer software developer, had wandered outside the Powder Mountain ski area on Christmas Eve and spent more than 18 hours, cold and alone, on the mountain. The temperatures were in the single digits.*

*"The best thing I could think of was to keep my brain occupied by playing music in my head and dancing to it to keep warm," Hartley said Friday. "I went through all the old disco songs, show tunes, popular and current stuff, Christmas tunes and even camp songs I'd ever known."*

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Karen Hartley danced her way  
Through the darkness of night  
And bone-chilling cold until she was rescued.

I have a friend, Pastor Hailue from Ethiopia  
Who, along with his colleagues  
In anticipation of being arrested and incarcerated  
For their Christian faith

Divided and memorized the entire New Testament.

In prison, during the long hours of the night  
They would take turns reciting whole books of the Bible

Their voices echoing down the halls of the prison  
Offering hope, not only to the Christians there  
But to the many non-believers  
Who became believers as a result.

~~

It is believed, Horatio Spafford composed  
His world-renowned hymn, our last hymn  
*When Peace Like a River*

As his own vessel sailed over the exact waters  
His four daughters perished in  
When their ship sank in the North Atlantic.

Spafford sang over and over through his darkest night  
Those words in the hymn's refrain  
*It is well, it is well . . . with my soul.*

~~

Many might have given up  
Had they been Karen Hartley  
And just curl up in the snow to die.

Many would have despaired in the prison cells of Ethiopia

But there are those whose rugged faith  
Keeps them going through periods of darkness.

~~

Another example of this is today's passage from Acts.

Paul and Silas were arrested for disturbing the peace  
In the city of Philippi  
By preaching the gospel in the marketplace.

They were beaten and thrown in prison.

They were in the deepest and darkest part of the prison.

Now you might think the two missionaries  
Might reconsider their call  
And ponder an early retirement.

Instead our passage informs us that about midnight  
Paul and Silas were heard  
Singing hymns at the top of their lungs!

Praying and singing so loud  
No one was getting any sleep!

When suddenly there was an earthquake  
So strong it rattled the doors open  
And shook the jail so hard  
Even the ankles chains fell off their feet.

The jailer, beside himself with fear that all had escaped  
Prepared to kill himself rather than face his superiors.

When Paul cried out to the jailor not to harm himself  
That in fact, they were all still there!

So amazed was he that he set them all free  
Brought them to his own home  
And fed them all a midnight snack!

And humbled by the experience  
He asked how he might be saved.

And Paul and Silas replied,  
“Believe in the Lord Jesus.”

Then he and his household were  
Every single one of them  
From the oldest to the youngest  
Baptized in the name of Jesus.

All this, the results of Paul and Silas  
Praying and singing through the night.

~~

We can't necessarily expect that to happen  
Every time we sing, pray, and dance  
Through the darkness of an hour.

However, such a thing has helped lessen the burdens  
That life can place on you.

Many a night was passed  
By the early African slaves  
By singing, praying and dancing through the night.

It helped make the load a little lighter  
And the day a little brighter!

Martin Luther King Jr  
Whose 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his assassination  
Is recognized this year

Said in his sermon, *A Knock at Midnight*:

*Our eternal message of hope is that dawn will come. Our slave fore-parents saw this. They were mindful of the fact of midnight. For always there was the whip of the overseer and the auction block where families were torn asunder to remind them of its reality.*

*When they thought of the agonizing darkness of midnight they sang:*

*Oh nobody knows the trouble I've seen  
Glory Hallelujah!  
Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down  
Oh yes, Lord.  
Sometimes I'm almost to de groun',  
Oh yes, Lord.  
Oh nobody knows de trouble I've seen  
Glory Hallelujah.*

~~

When darkness falls upon our lives  
And it will . . .

Financial disaster, loss of a loved one  
Health issues, injustices placed upon our lives

We have two choices before us.

We can sink down in despair  
And curl up in the snow and freeze to death.

We can be apathetic, give up  
And not fight the chains that bind us . . .

Or we can fight against what keeps us in prison.

Paul and Silas did not give up . . .

Neither did Karen Hartley or Hailue.

We can do what they did,  
Sing, and pray, and dance through our midnights!

Again from his sermon, *A Knock at Midnight*:

*Encompassed by a staggering midnight but believing that morning would come, they sang,*

*I'm so glad trouble don't last always  
Oh my Lord, oh my Lord, what shall I do?*

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When confronted with the obstacles life presents  
    Whatever problem, disappointment, injustice  
        There might be in your life . . .

Roll with the punches . . .  
    Wrestle with the angel . . .  
        Don't give up . . .

Believe that all things will work for good  
    For those who love God and seek his purpose.

There will be times when hardships come.

When trouble straps its shackles around you;

Like Paul and Silas  
    With chains around your ankles  
        Locked behind your prison doors

Like Karen Hartley  
    Staring subzero temperatures of a long night ahead

Like Hailue, facing persecution  
    Or Spafford facing tremendous loss

What will you do?

Sing! Dance! Shout with courage in the face of the night.

Martin Luther King Jr: *Their positive belief in the dawn was the growing edge of hope that kept the slaves faithful amid the most barren and tragic circumstances.*

*Faith in the dawn arises from the faith that God is good and just . . . . Even the most starless midnight may herald the dawn of some great fulfillment.*

~~

These are the images we have . . .

In the pitch black darkness  
In the bowels of a prison cell

Their feet bound in chains  
Their backs open wounds  
We find Paul and Silas singing!

On a snowy mountaintop chilled to the bone  
We find Karen Hartley dancing the night away!

Incarcerated in Ethiopia,  
Hailue recites verse after verse of Scripture!

On a moonless night in the North Atlantic  
Horatio Spafford chanting the words, *it is well*.

~~

It has been said  
That the darkest hour is just before dawn.

And so remember,  
The darker the hour the closer to dawn.

Keep the faith . . .

Pray, sing, and dance through the darkness of your night  
Your dawn is coming . . .