CONTEND:

.....For Change [Acts 12: 1-16]

Summary

When Peter was in prison, the believers were praying hard that he would be released. Their prayers were answered! But when he came to let the believers know, Rhoda was so excited she forgot to open the door to let him in!

When we pray, we are sometimes required to take action!

It's not always easy to recognise God's voice – and it is even harder when we realise that we may have to make changes as a result. Contending in prayer can also mean contending for change – in the ways I do things!

The development of safeguarding initiatives in the church has happened because there has been a recognition that the way we were doing things was creating an environment where abuse could be hidden.

It is an answer to the cries of distress of those who were abused and to the prayers of those who have wanted to see change when they have learnt about the abuse that has happened. God sometimes uses the ordinary things of life as an answer to our needs. Safeguarding in church draws on much of the material that has been developed elsewhere (sadly churches have been slow to recognise the need for safeguarding) while also being cognisant that spiritual abuse can occur in churches. Spiritual abuse is a type of emotional and psychological abuse using religious language, beliefs, or authority to manipulate or dominate another person.

In our reading we see that while the church's prayers were answered and Peter was released from prison, earlier James had been killed. We don't always get the outcome that we want. When we think about safeguarding, we are thinking about how we can get better at protecting people from harm . We don't have a 'magic wand' and while we will continue to pray, we also seek to support those who have been harmed.

Questions

1. What is the most embarrassing thing you have done?

2. How do you think God works through the world?

3. What helps you notice God at work in the world?

4. How do you feel when the answers to prayers mean that you have to change in some way? How easy is it to change long held attitudes and beliefs?

5. In law, all children under the age of 18 and certain adults are classified as vulnerable.But anyone can be vulnerable at certain points in their lives, for example when experiencing bereavement, redundancy or illness. What might love in truth and action look like in order to safeguard those who are vulnerable in the short-term due to specific circumstances?

6. How do you think the culture of the church may mask inappropriate behaviours (either now or in the past), How have you noticed the culture of the church change?

7. What would you do if you noticed something inappropriate or were concerned about something?