

Peter and Imprisonment

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Preacher: Rev. Jill Flowers

[0 : 00] So now you can understand the sketch of the bird being captured and put in prison and the other animals praying for her release.

This passage that Sonia's just read for us has all the hallmarks that would make an epic film. The wicked king arresting and killing Christians. The suspense and the danger that Peter is in. The anxiety and the fervent prayer of the Christians pleading with God to save Peter. The supernatural intervention of the angel. The comedic moments of the angel having to hit him to wake him up. He's so deeply asleep and then Rhoda the maidservant leaving him shut outside the house because she's so excited.

And then the joyous reunion. When I read the chapter that I was given from the series that you're doing this time round, Postcards from the Edge, I could have got about four or five different sermons from the material.

[1 : 19] If you've not read it, it's a really, really good read. And I've ordered the book because I loved it so much. But it's an all-age worship and it's meant to be shorter, so I had to choose one angle to go from this morning.

And there's a story in the book, Postcards from the Edge, about a woman called Deborah Searle who rode across the Atlantic alone.

And it was really, really hard work and really scary. And at times she wondered what on earth she was doing and she felt like she wanted to give up. But three words kept her going through that time. Every morning she said to herself, choose your attitude. How are you going to deal with what life throws at you today?

Are you going to let it defeat you? Or are you going to survive and thrive? The situation that Peter was in was dire.

[2 : 32] King Herod had already arrested James, the brother of John, and had him executed. And had received so much praise from the Romans and from the Jews that he was really excited about that.

He was all about wanting to receive the glory and the wonder and everybody else liking him. And so he thought, I need to carry on and do this to get more praise. And so he had Peter arrested. While Peter is in prison, he's expected to have a trial the next day. Which would certainly, with great certainty, lead to his execution.

And to make sure that he doesn't escape because, you know, what happened to the body of Jesus and all sorts of things can happen. There are four loads of soldiers who are around to make sure that he doesn't.

And he's chained between two big burly soldiers. Now if I was in that situation, and I knew that tomorrow I would be going to trial.

[3 : 39] And an unfair trial at that. And that tomorrow was probably going to be the day that I died. I don't think I would sleep. But Peter just settled down and went so deeply asleep.

That when the angel came to wake him up, he had to hit him on the side to get him awake. The thing is that Peter just gave it all to God.

There was absolutely nothing that he could do. Nothing he could say would make a difference. And so he just gave it to God.

And, you know, whether I live or whether I die is in God's hands. I trust it all to him. And went to sleep. On the other side of town, the Christians had gathered to pray for Peter.

Now that was a dangerous thing to do. It was really dangerous gathering together at that time. King Herod was on the rampage.

[4 : 43] And the more Christians that he caught, the more glory that he would get. So gathering together was a huge risk. But Luke tells us that constant prayer was made to God on Peter's behalf. Peter was called to rest. The church was called to action. Peter was in prison and there is nothing he could do to save himself.

So he entrusted himself totally to the hands of God. The church, however, could do the most powerful thing there is. And that was to pray. That was then.

This is now. And while there still are very many Christians around the world who are being imprisoned and persecuted for their faith, this passage speaks to each one of us here too. Because many people here this morning are imprisoned in some way. There might be through pain. Or through fear.

[5 : 57] Through anxiety. Or to addiction. It might be through anger. Or bitterness. The inability to forgive.

Through shame. Or maybe through coping with the fact that you didn't get the results in exams that you wanted to get. And it has such a tight hold on you.

That you might as well be behind bars. Chained between two enormous soldiers. You tried to escape it.

You tried so hard. But in the end those chains won't break. You just can't get free.

Maybe, if that's you here this morning, you need to try a new tack. To stop striving. To give it to God.

[7 : 04] And to know the deep peace that reminds you that he's got it in hand. And he'll see you through. But there's another thing that you can do.

You can tell a trusted friend. Or friends. Who will pray for you. Constantly. That you will be set free. That you'll be released. From this prison. You don't have to carry it alone. Remember in the gospel stories.

There's that story where Jesus was preaching in a house. And it was absolutely crowded. And some friends brought a paralyzed man.

You know that story. To see Jesus. And they couldn't get into the house. So they went up onto the roof. And they tore a hole in the roof. The homeowner must have been delighted. No insurance in those days.

[8 : 04] And lowered the man down through the roof. To Jesus. That paralyzed man. Had no means of getting there on his own. He was incapable.

He couldn't walk. He couldn't do it. His friends. Brought him. To Jesus. So that he could be released. And freed. And able to walk. And that's what we can do.

As Christians. Because while there are those. Who are imprisoned. There may be some of you sat here. Thinking well. Today's sermon's not for me.

Might as well have not come. What's going to speak to me? You can be the ones who pray.

Because. How wonderful. That you haven't got that burden.

But others have. And without the friends. Of that paralyzed man. He wouldn't have been healed.

And without the prayers. Of those Christians. For Peter.

[9 : 00] In prison. We don't know. What would have happened. So for those of you. Who aren't. Burdened. In any way.

Like this. Can you be the prayers? Can you get alongside someone. Who is hurting. Who is. Bound. Who is imprisoned. By something. That is holding them so tight.

It's stopping them being. The people they're meant to be. And pray for them. Like never before. Who do you know.

Who's struggling. Get alongside them. And fight for them. Deborah Searle.

Rode across. The Atlantic Ocean. Trying to decide each day. Whether she wanted to carry on. But saying every day. Choose. Your attitude.

[9 : 58] What are you going to choose. Today. Peace. Or action. If you're burdened.

Give it to Jesus. If you're not. Pray for those who are. And then live it. Hit the Christian life.

Knowing. That he is at work.

Within each one of us. Amen. Amen.