

Order of Worship for August 4, 2024

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Opening Hymn: *"Hark the Glad Sound"* - Hymn #349

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism: Dylan Kay Baier

Confession and Forgiveness p. 151

Service of the Word

Entrance Psalm:

P: You will arise and have pity on Zion;

C: it is the time to favor her; the appointed time has come.

P: Let this be recorded for a generation to come, that He looked down from His holy height;

C: from heaven the LORD looked at the earth,

P: to hear the groans of the prisoners,

C: to set free those who were doomed to die,

P: that they may declare in Zion the name of the LORD,

C: and in Jerusalem His praise,

P: when peoples gather together,

C: and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.

ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

P: You will arise and have pity on Zion;

C: it is the time to favor her; the appointed time has come.

Kyrie: (*Lord Have Mercy*) p. 152

Hymn of Praise: (*This Is the Feast*) pg. 155

Salutation: p. 156

Prayer of the Day:

P: Let us pray... O Lord, by Your bountiful goodness release us from the bonds of our sins, which by reason of our weakness we have brought upon ourselves, that we may stand firm until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

First Reading: Acts 12:1-17

R: About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the

Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." And Peter went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

When Peter realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Reading: 1 Peter 3:8-17

R: Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Alleluia: p 156

Holy Gospel: Luke 4:16-21

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke the fourth chapter:

C: Glory to You, O Lord. (sung)

P: And Jesus came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and He stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captive and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” And Jesus rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ. (sung)

Sermon Hymn: “*Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness*” - **Hymn #849**

Sermon: “*Freed from Prison*” – Acts 12:1-17

Persecution of Christians is nothing new, although we are unused to it here in America, where the Church enjoyed a privileged position in our culture for most of our brief history. But not so around the world! From the very beginning, governments and religious rulers have threatened God’s people. In the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah was beaten, thrown in prison, tossed down a well, and ultimately kidnapped. According to legend, Isaiah was sawn in half. John the Baptist was beheaded. And just days after Pentecost, when God poured out his Holy Spirit on Jesus’ disciples, the apostles were arrested, beaten, and questioned for preaching the name of Jesus in the Temple. Jesus said that this shouldn’t surprise us. He warns:

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you...” (John 15:18-20a, ESV).

Why does the world hate Christians? Because the world hates Jesus! We are his disciples, and we will not fare any better than Jesus Himself did. He was arrested, mocked, flogged, beaten, and ultimately died on a cross. They will do that and worse to those who follow him.

We see that in today’s lesson, the story of Peter’s release from prison. King Herod, the grandson of the King Herod who killed the children of Bethlehem and the nephew of the King Herod who beheaded John the Baptist and before whom Jesus appeared on Good Friday, decided to persecute the church. He kills James, brother of John, the other disciple whose martyrdom appears in the Bible. Then, seeing that pleased the great crowd gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, he had Peter arrested, as well.

This wasn't the first time Peter was arrested. He'd been arrested twice before, recorded in Acts chapters 4 and 5. The first time, Peter along with John was released because of their popularity after healing a lame man at the temple. The second time, they were released by an angel and returned to proclaiming the message of Jesus in the temple courts, the very thing they were arrested for doing. When brought before the religious council yet again, Peter boldly proclaimed, "We must obey God rather than men." They were beaten but released, and the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus.

This time, Herod learned from other's mistakes. He has four squads of soldiers to guard Peter, and is bound with chains between two guards. And so this prison experience was different from the other two for Peter. This time, he was alone except for the guards, and the deliverance did not come right away. The other two times, he was able to witness, but this time, no special witnessing opportunities appeared. Peter's previous arrests had taken place after great victories, but this one followed the death of James, his dear friend and colleague. It was a new situation altogether.

Yet despite that, Peter is calm. If you were chained to two Roman soldiers and facing the possibility of being executed the next day, would you sleep very soundly? Probably not, but Peter did. In fact, Peter was so sound asleep that the angel had to strike him on the side to wake him up!

What gave Peter such confidence and peace in the midst of this trial? We often think that the great miracle of Pentecost was that the apostles were able to be understood in different languages by the power of the Holy Spirit. But the real miracle was that these men who had been hiding for fear of being arrested and killed like Jesus had been were now boldly sharing the message of Jesus, and what his death and resurrection meant.

That boldness and confidence is what had gotten Peter arrested in the first place, and it was what gave Peter peace as he awaited what the next day would bring.

The Holy Spirit was still with Peter. More than that, even though he seemed alone, he wasn't. The church, his fellow believers, were with him. Not physically, but spiritually. The church didn't try to stage a jailbreak. They didn't go to the authorities and plead their case. They didn't protest outside of the jail demanding Peter's release. They did what only the church can do. They prayed.

The power of the church is the power of prayer. And God is a God of liberation. The Passover festival they were celebrating was to celebrate the freedom of God's people from slavery in Egypt, after all. And their prayers were answered. Peter was set free by an angel, and led out of the prison. It was so unbelievable that Peter thought it was a dream or a vision. But it wasn't. It really happened.

Peter wasn't the only one who didn't believe what had happened. When Peter went to the house where the believers were gathered to pray, Rhoda, the slave girl who answers the door, is so excited that she runs away to go tell everyone without opening the gate so Peter can come in! And without Peter there by her, everyone else doesn't believe her. It took Peter's continuous

knocking to finally get more people to come to the gate, and then they finally see Peter. They can see that God had freed Peter, and they were overjoyed.

Of course, that isn't the only time people disbelieved what should be good news. When the women returned from the empty tomb with the news that Jesus was raised from the dead, no one believed them. It wasn't what they expected. Peter and John had to go check for themselves, and it still took Jesus Himself appearing to them before they would believe what the women had told them.

On November 21, 1943, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a letter from Tegel Prison, where he was imprisoned for his part in a plot against Hitler. "A prison cell like this is a good analogy for Advent," he said. "One waits, hopes, does this or that—ultimately negligible things—the door is locked and can only be opened from the outside."

The comparison between Advent and a prison cell may seem strange. It evokes powerlessness, perhaps even hopelessness. However, it is this particular type of waiting that we as Christians are called to do. Peter could do nothing to free himself from prison. The door could only be opened from the outside. But God did so, and freed Peter.

We still live in a world where we could be imprisoned for our beliefs. Our sister church, St Paul, had their evening Vacation Bible School earlier this week. They raised money for a Lutheran school in Pakistan. They can meet for worship, but there are strict penalties for evangelism and conversion. Other countries can be even less open than that, and Christians face imprisonment, discrimination, and even death for their faith.

Yet from that persecution can come great faith. In waves of persecution during the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, Chinese believers were fined, imprisoned, and tortured. Yet despite this government oppression, a spiritual revival broke out that could well be the largest in the history of the church. As many as fifty million believers gave their allegiance to an invisible kingdom even as the visible kingdom made them suffer for it. The gulags and prisons in Russia were full of believers during the time of the USSR, and became the homes of thriving underground churches. For seventy years prisons had been the repository of truth, the one place where you could safely speak the name of God.

We may not face imprisonment for our faith, but we have still been set free. Free from the power of sin. It's a freedom we couldn't achieve on our own. But as Jesus announced to the crowd at Nazareth, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captive." That's Good News for us. That's Good News we can share.

Prayer of the Church

P: Lord in Your mercy,
C: hear our prayer.

Sharing Our Ministry:

Offering and Voluntary:

Service of the Sacrament p. 160

Preface: p. 160

P: It is truly good, right, and proper that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who came to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners of sin, and overcame death and the grave through His death and resurrection. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and singing. . . .

Sanctus: (*Holy, Holy, Holy*) p. 161

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

P: We give thanks to You Lord God for freeing us from the bondage of sin and gathering us together as Your people. Grant that we may be strengthened through this meal of Your Son's body and blood so we may go forth and share all You have done for us. Hear us as we pray in the name of Jesus and as He has taught us . . .

The Words of Our Lord p. 162

Pax Domini: (*Peace of the Lord*) and **Agnus Dei:** (*Lamb of God*) p. 163

Distribution of Holy Communion:

"Oh, For a Thousand Tongues" - **Hymn #528**

"The Saints in Christ Are One in Every Place" - **Hymn #838**

Song after Communion: (*Thank the Lord*) p. 164

Prayer after Communion:

P: Eternal Father, we thank you for giving us pardon and peace in this meal. Strengthen us to live as people freed from the power of sin, with faith toward You and love toward one another, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Blessing: p. 166

Closing Hymn: "*Jesus Shall Reign*" - **Hymn # 832**

Postlude

