

Easter 7-May 29, 2022

Baltic and East Nidaros Parish

Acts 16:16-45 and John 17:20-26

“Set Free” *Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad*

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

There is quite a bit of praying happening in our lessons for today. In the first lesson, Paul and Silas were on their way to a house of prayer when they were interrupted by a slave girl who was held captive by a spirit that provided profit for her owners. Then after Paul and Silas were flogged and beaten by Roman authorities for interrupting their customs, Paul and Silas were in prison praying and singing hymns while their feet were fastened in stocks. The entire gospel for today is Jesus praying. In his prayer, Jesus is not only praying for people who already believe, but also and especially Jesus is praying for those who have yet to hear the gospel of their salvation. When Jesus was praying, Jesus was praying for the girl who would one day annoy Paul and Silas. Jesus was praying for Paul and Silas who were preaching the gospel and would suffer for his name's sake. Jesus was praying for the jailor who had not heard the gospel. Jesus was also praying for each of you here today listening to his words that will set you free.

This has been a week for frequent praying for many of us. The people of Uvalde Texas have asked for everyone in our country and around the world to pray for them. In Dell Rapids the family and friends of 14-year-old Zander Heathcote whose life ended too soon riding his bicycle have requested prayers for healing following this tragic accident. Prayers are ascending this week as we remember service men and women of our country who have given their lives for our freedom. These three prayer petitions are significant prayers, but many of us have concerns known only to us that our Lord has commanded us to remove from our worries and cast on him.

While we are commanded to pray frequently and with persistence, the outcome of our prayers does not depend on how earnestly we pray or how many prayer warriors we have asked to join in our prayers. The outcome of our prayer's rests solely in the one who has promised to hear our every prayer. Our Heavenly Father not only hears our prayer requests, but he also hears prayer requests that are in opposition to each other and then he decides the right time for giving us what we truly need.

The girl who had the spirit removed from her by the prayers of Paul and Silas had people who were benefiting financially from her fortune-telling, so it would not be hard to imagine that her owners were praying that the spirit would remain in her or would somehow return to her after it was removed. For the past nearly three weeks, my daughter-in-law has been praying for the early arrival of our granddaughter to remove the discomfort of pregnancy, while at the same time, I have been selfishly praying that she goes full term so that I wouldn't have to assume greater responsibilities at home while my son was taking time off after the delivery. And even now only a few days after the horrific shooting in Uvalde, it seems the attention has turned quickly from praying for the victims and their families and yes even the family of the killer who like the girl that Paul and Silas prayed for must have been possessed by an evil spirit to placing blame in various places and offering

opinions that might have reduced the number of fatalities. We give thanks that our Heavenly Father has remained steadfast in hearing each of our prayers and has given hope and faith in places that seem anything but hopeful during this tragic event in our country.

The suffering that Paul and Silas went through seemed senseless too. The girl may have been annoying them, but she was only confessing the truth by declaring that Paul and Silas were proclaiming a way of salvation. Jesus told his disciples not to be surprised when they would suffer for the sake of the gospel. Paul and Silas were treated much like Jesus was before his death. Paul and Silas survived the flogging and beatings from rods and instead of being crucified they were thrown into prison. Their feet were disabled, but the jailor failed to stop their greatest weapon. Paul and Silas still had their voices and in the midst of their pain and suffering, they prayed and began to sing hymns.

The jailor was given one job to do and that was to prevent Paul and Silas from breaking free from their bondage. The jailor may have prayed to someone that they wouldn't escape, but soon after Paul and Silas ended a hymn and a prayer the jail was shaken apart by an earthquake from the Lord answering their prayer from their jail cell. It was then that the jailor realized that although he was on the right side of the bars of the jail, it was he who was in bondage. The jailor wanted to experience the freedom of his captives expressed by not fearing further punishment or even death. The jailor asked the most important question we all must answer about our salvation. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas told him to "Believe on the Lord, Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household."

This jailor's life had been turned around by the prayers and singing of Paul and Silas behind the bars of the jail. Instead of beating Paul and Silas more, the jailor attended to their wounds. Instead of taking his own life, the jailor asked for the salvation of his whole family. It did not take long for the prayers of Paul and Silas to be answered by the jailor being filled with faith. We are told that he and his whole household were baptized without delay, and all of this took place within the same hour.

One of the main focuses of this weekend is for us to remember people who have died in service to our country. It is good for us also to remember family members who are no longer with us. As I planted geraniums at a few of the gravesites of our ancestors, I was prevented by my mother from planting anything in the urn that sits by the gravestone at West Nidaros of Annie and John Hilmoe, my great aunt and uncle who lived where we live now. I was prevented because in the urn was a family of four killdeer baby chicks who were not yet ready to fly but were carefully watched by their parents who were making loud noises and doing their broken wing dance as I approached the urn. My mom told me to leave them alone until they were able to leave their nest.

Yes, we remember different things this Memorial Day. But today, we also remember the ascension of our Lord Jesus who before he was taken up to his heavenly father, he prayed. He prayed for those who have been set free from the bondage of sin and he prayed for those who are still waiting to hear this good news. Just like the jailor and his whole household being set free within the hour after hearing Paul and Silas pray and sing hymns, during this hour of worship, you too have received the good news of your salvation and will leave this place, set free. Free as a bird who we know is watched and cared for by our heavenly Father. Amen