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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
January 17, 2021  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 49:1-6, Mark 1:4-11

Hymns: 224; 245; 531; 309

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Acts 16:25-34

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. <sup>27</sup> And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. <sup>28</sup> But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

<sup>29</sup> Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

<sup>31</sup> So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." <sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. <sup>33</sup> And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his *family* were baptized. <sup>34</sup> Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: These are troubling times.

I think we need to go back to my college days to find anything similar to the times we are living right now. Back in the late 1960's and early '70's there were riots and bombings and scandals and demonstrations and too many people hurt and killed in Viet Nam. Even so the troubles facing our country today may be even more unsettling. It is not only the pandemic, and the division about how that is being managed by different government entities, and the strain that it is bringing on our society, but then we have a tremendous political mess. That mess appears to threaten the continuing existence of our republic with vitriol flowing from both sides. It is trouble that reminds the child of God to lean upon His God. More about that in our annual pastoral address in two weeks.

Today the Spirit gives direction to our response to all that has been going on, as well as preparing us to respond appropriately in a spiritual way if things continue to deteriorate. Faithful Christians may face direct challenges, perhaps even persecution in the days and years that lie ahead of us.

May we learn from the example of Paul and Silas as they were unjustly beaten and jailed, that we might better understand --

**THEME: What the World Needs to Hear from Us.**

It is important for us to begin with understanding our role in this world and what the world needs to hear from us --

**I. In Our Trials -- Our Hymns of Praise to the Lord!**

Our text takes us to an inner dungeon where Paul and Silas were not only locked up in a cell, but since the jailor had received instructions to keep them secure their feet were also placed in the stocks. This was a most uncomfortable position to be in, without even considering that the authorities had ordered Paul and Silas beaten without cause, and certainly without due process. This was not because of some crime, or some evil they had done, but for the sake of Jesus' name!

A demon possessed girl had been following after Paul and Silas in the city of Philippi for several days calling out, “*These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.*”” (Acts 16:17) That annoyed Paul, and he commanded in Jesus’ name that the demon come out of this slave girl. When her owners saw that they would no longer make money from her fortune telling, they set the magistrates upon Paul and Silas, accusing them of wrongdoing. And so Paul and Silas were severely beaten, and placed in the stocks in the inner dungeon.

Now to our point: what did the world need to hear from Paul and Silas at that moment? They heard what they needed to hear. It wasn’t recrimination. It certainly wasn’t cursing and swearing, and threats of revenge if and when they ever got out of there. It wasn’t, “Just wait, you’ll get your own! What goes around, comes around.” That is not what the world needed to hear, and that is not what anyone did hear from Paul and Silas. They were in an inner prison cell. Who was going to hear anything from them? What difference would it make no matter what they said?

There were people, people of this world who could and did hear Paul and Silas. What they heard was “*at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.*” (v.25)

At that moment, in that situation it was more important for Paul and Silas, it was more important to the others in the prison that Paul and Silas be seen as Christ believers rather than as Roman citizens! What people heard were songs of praise to God. What kind of praise could possibly be flowing from their hearts and from their lips in these extreme circumstances? When the Apostles had been beaten and commanded not to speak any longer in Jesus’ name, “*they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.*” (Acts 5:41) It is very likely that Paul and Silas sang similar words of praise from their prison cell. It is also most certain that they sang of their salvation in Jesus. Perhaps they sang something similar to one of our hymns: Their “*hope was built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness! ... On Christ the solid Rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand!*” (The Lutheran Hymnal 370:1)

In their time of extreme trial Paul and Silas sang praises to their Savior God. Surely that was where their hope was in that dark hour, and not only was it important for them to stay focused on their salvation found in the grace and love of God and their Savior Jesus Christ, but everybody else that could hear them throughout the prison heard about it as they sang! In times of trial, when children of God are suffering affliction, especially when it is because of their faith, the world doesn't need to hear our thoughts on social political affairs. They do need to hear the testimony of our hope. In that way Paul and Silas' faith stood out as a bright light in a dark and gloomy dungeon.

And so it should be for us also. There are a great many things that distress us in life, especially under the present world circumstances. We also may face persecution at least in the form of ridicule and being criticized for holding to Scriptural truth, to God's truth. Remember then Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount. "*Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. **Rejoice and be exceedingly glad**, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*" (Matthew 5:11-12)

That is the first challenge to our faith in times of trial and persecution, that we remember that this comes to us as a BLESSING from the Lord and not a curse! We too should be like the Apostles, "*rejoicing that we were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.*" (Acts 5:41) When we suffer trials and tribulations we have cause to praise the Lord and rejoice in His grace!

Then let us also remember these words from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: "*You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. <sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:14-16)

When enduring challenging circumstances in life that is not the time to hide our faith, but to let it shine! Jesus assures us that others will see and AND glorify our Father in heaven. In our times

of trial the world needs to hear our faith in words of praise. This isn't only about what *we* need for our faith, but about what *the world* needs to hear from us! The world needs to hear our **faith**, not our politics! The world has plenty of pundits to spout politics.

So then consider what the world needs to hear --

## **II. In Their Despair – God's Forgiveness in Christ.**

One thing of which every child of God may be assured is that deliverance will come from the Lord! We need never, ever despair! God is faithful! (1 Corinthians 1:9) And so it was for Paul and Silas. Suddenly in the middle of the night there was a great earthquake that shook the prison to its very foundations, and every door to every cell was opened, and the stocks on Paul and Silas were loosed. With God all things are possible, (Matthew 19:26) and He is able to deliver those who call upon His name! But the deliverance of God's people is often perceived as disaster for the world, disaster that easily translates into despair!

When the jailer awoke because of the earthquake and rose quickly to see all the prison doors were open he concluded that all the prisoners had escaped, and he was immediately overwhelmed with despair. He knew that what lay before him was to receive the worst of any of the sentences of all the prisoners. Indeed, he could himself face a slow and excruciatingly painful execution. Despair led him to draw his sword to end his life quickly. Only Paul's intervention prevented an eternal disaster! Being told that all prisoners were accounted for brought such relief that the jailer turned to Paul and Silas with the most important of all questions in this world. "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" (v. 30)

Paul and Silas' answer is what the world needs to hear in their time of despair.

**Acts 16:31–34** "So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." <sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. <sup>33</sup> And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his *family* were baptized. <sup>34</sup> Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food

before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household

This answer was **not** a list of works of penance. It was **not** a list of charitable deeds. It was **not** the recitation of the Ten Commandments. In fact, it was nothing that the jailer could do. It was an invitation to believe. It was a call to repentance that came to this man, and his family through the message of the gospel of Christ. “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!*” What does that mean? You and I know what that means. It means to trust in Jesus’ merits, Jesus’ righteousness, Jesus’ sacrifice upon the cross for the forgiveness of sins. Paul and Silas spoke the word of God to this man and his household. They brought Jesus to them in the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit worked faith in their hearts. That same night the jailer and his family were baptized. They received that washing of water with the Word of God that assures us that indeed our sins are washed away, and that even as “*we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*” (Romans 6:4)

That newness of life was evident immediately in the jailer’s heart and life! “*He rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.*” (v.34) And the fruits of faith were evident. The jailer himself tended to Paul and Silas’ wounds. He fed them and cared for them. There was hope and joy leading to eternal life, when previously there had been only despair leading eternal death. He heard from Paul and Silas what he needed to hear in his despair.

You know this truth. You hold this truth in your heart. Those who have seen and heard what you have to say in your times of trial will turn to you in their times of despair. The world doesn’t need to hear empty platitudes, or empty well wishes such as, “Don’t worry, it will all work out somehow! Cheer up things will get better. The sun will come out tomorrow! You will feel better with time. Don’t be sad.” The world doesn’t need lists of works needed to be done to appease God.

You have got to do better than that. You know Jesus. If right now you don’t feel ready to put your faith into words then work on that. Come to church **and** Bible class where we have more opportunity

to express our faith in our own words. If you talk about your faith with family and fellow believers you will be better prepared to say the things the world needs to hear from us in their despair. Tell them about Jesus and how He came down to earth to be our Brother, to fulfill all righteousness, to bear our sin and take it away. Tell them how we have life in Jesus' name. Because He rose, because He lives, we shall rise and we shall live also! Tell the despairing of this world of the wonder of baptism in which the Triune God comes to us with the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. Yes, the world needs to hear the message of the hope that we possess in our hearts.

Now is the time. We look at the world, we look at America and we see a whole heap of trouble, and the only hope that is held out to the masses is founded on man: financial oligarchs who regard themselves as wiser than all others, presidents, governors, scientists, all fallible human beings! We know Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, the Lord our Redeemer. We have in our hearts and minds what the world needs to hear in times like these.

**AMEN.**

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)