

## **Pastor Roy's Sermon from May 12, 2013**

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

5/12/13

Paul and Silas give themselves over to the flow of events around him. He and Silas set the slave girl free and take what comes. A mob forms when her owners make up a story of Paul and Silas stirring up trouble in the city. The magistrates get involved not wanting the status quo peace to be upset. Their idea of peace, and Jesus' idea of peace were different. One is an outward peace for the sake of some while the other is an inward peace for the sake of all. The city magistrates have Paul and Silas beaten and imprisoned. How do the apostles respond to this trouble? They sing and pray and everyone in the jail knew they were there and that they were different. But then comes the earthquake. The jailer fears the prisoners have escaped, but is assured otherwise by Paul and Silas.

Again, Paul and Silas could have run from their fears to where their fears would still be awaiting, but they listened to the Spirit and entrusted themselves to God. They did not react against the events, they waded through them, even if it was painful. Severe flogging is akin to what Jesus went through leading up to the crucifixion. It was an extreme form of punishment. There was no concern about whether the accused who had no rights survived. Pax Romana was a concern for order. The Romans wanted order—those who violated it were executed, or beaten so they wish they were dead. A few were gladly sacrificed so that the rest of the peasants would fear breaking the law.

When they refused to flee, the jailer became very interested in this way of life that allowed them to pray and sing after being so tortured and actually care about their jailer. He went to them and begged them to tell him how he might also be saved. They told him about the way of Christ and assured him that he and his household could also live this way. They told everyone in his family about this way, he cleaned up their wounds, they baptized him and all of his household, and then they all ate together.

In the morning the tables were turned when the magistrates, for whatever reason, were ready to release Paul and Silas who informed them that they were Roman Citizens. The magistrates were afraid then because Roman citizens had legal rights and these had clearly been violated. The rulers came and apologized and asked them to leave the city. After visiting a bit with Lydia and the growing local congregation, they did just that.

Four times Paul and Silas give themselves over to God without resisting the Spirit. They did not resist trouble or hardship for the sake of the cause of Christ. Instead, they seek the way of peace, kindness, and mercy--regardless of the consequences. They aren't driven by self-interest, convenience, or comfort, but by love--even for their enemies.

First, they cared about the servant girl. Second, they prayed and sang after being beaten. They did not flee after their chains were loosened. Third, they welcomed the questions of the jailer before he showed any kindness to them, and invited him and his household to join with the movement of believers at Lydia's house, and baptized them all. Finally, they accepted the apology of the magistrates without any desire to seek restitution or revenge.

Clearly, for Paul and Silas, faith was not an opportunity to get ahead in life. . . Faith was a life force that transformed the life they lived...moment by moment. In Christ, they were truly free.

I have seen this faith in many people. Do we practice it perfectly? No. Does it transform our lives? Yes. Does it give us hope and peace in the challenges, chances, and changes of our lives? Absolutely.

The challenge is to accept Christ's call to entrust ourselves, come what may, to God. The challenge is to see our lives not as a reaction to everything we fear, but as an embrace of everything that we love, and trust, and in which we hope. There is a very big difference.

Christ and the apostles and the saints invite us to respond in love, not to react in anxiety-ridden fear. Then we are free and no one, no thing can hold us in bondage. We are free to live a life yielded to God.

I believe Paul sums up this surrender well in Romans 8: “We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? *As it is written,*

‘For your sake we are being killed all day long;  
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.’

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul is describing a life of total freedom—a life surrendered to God who invites us to grow out of compulsive behavior, mistrust, and fear so that we might trust in the stronger force of God's sustaining love and mercy which will never disappoint. When he was mindful of his surrender to God, Paul hadn't a worry in the world, and the gospel of Christ's love and peace went out in ever widening circles!

He followed the mercy of the Spirit, and left the rest to God. If it worked out (whatever that means!), fine, if it didn't “work out,” well, that would have to be fine too. He was *that* convinced along with Jesus Christ that the Way of wisdom and rest, the way of peace, was the only true way—the way of God.

Jesus prays in today's Gospel reading that we might know the love and unity which he shared with God. Jesus was yielded, he learned to surrender his life, his decisions, his hopes and dreams over to God. That is the narrow way of which he spoke. There is no other way to peace. Shortcuts and substitutions are the wide path that lead to bondage, injustice, anxiety and despair.

The path is one of letting go, over, and over, and over again. Like a tree that responds to the seasons, to the cold, to the wind, to draught, to abundance. Like Jesus listening to God. Like Paul, learning to allow the river of life in the Spirit to take him where it will.

This Spirit invites us to move with Christ as he returns to the father and comes again into the world in our moments of yieldedness which increase with our faith.

God, teach us to yield to love and mercy and peace in all things. Amen.