

Emma King's Talk Sunday 22 September 2024

'Partnering with Angels' Acts 12:1-17 Peter's escape from prison

Isaiah 42: 6-7

"I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;
I will take hold of your hand.
I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles,
7 to open eyes that are blind,
to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Isaiah 61: 1-3

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,^[a]
2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion—

Psalms 146:7-8

He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets prisoners free,
8 the Lord gives sight to the blind,

These are just a few pieces of scripture that talk of setting prisoners free. And I want you to hold those in your mind.

But what does it mean to be set free?

In our reading today, we hear of Peter being held in prison. Peter was bound in chains. Each of his arms was chained to a guard. And even if he had got out of those chains there were two more soldiers guarding the door of the cell. More guards in the corridor and then the big iron gate which of course was locked.

No hope of escape there then! But God had other plans. And as he often does, he sends an angel. Escape was totally impossible. It was so unthinkable that Peter could not believe for an instant that he was actually getting out of prison. He thought he was just dreaming. But the miracle was happening! God really was setting this prisoner free!

But from these readings that I've just said, why are we so surprised? It was written in scriptures. We so easily forget of the miracles that we read about in the bible. So why was Peter so surprised at this one? He thought he was dreaming. This couldn't possibly be real.

What I find the funny about this story, is that all that after all that has happened. Peter runs to find his friends to tell them of this miracle and he's probably hammering on the door panting and shouting. Rhoda answers and is so excited that he's there but she leaves him on the doorstep! I can imagine the confusion! She rushes to tell everyone and no one believes her! It says in verse 5 – Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. And now their prayers have been answered, no one believes it!! They think she's gone mad! They don't believe their prayers have been answered. But then they go to the door because Peter keeps knocking and they are in shock. God answers prayer. Even when our faith is weak. We often think we need to achieve a certain amount of faith before God will answer our prayers. Instead, this passage shows us we don't need great faith – just faith in a great God! Be encouraged. Those first Christians weren't super-saints.

Even the apostles who had been with Jesus were not so different from us. They had their doubts. They had their questions. And we all have questions don't we. We are all prisoners of something.

Each week, on a Monday, as you know I go up to the hub. I often describe it as my favourite day of the week. And the reason I do, is because it's real. But also, because I see people up there who I can pray earnestly for. Each week, we have a dedicated group of people who cook a three-course meal. They don't know what they are cooking until they get there and see what food is there from fare share. We have a group of wonderful people who serve the food. Taking orders and orders, remembering who wants what and who doesn't like what. We have a team of people who wash plate after plate, and fork after fork who are quite often the last ones to leave. Ken and Barbara and Callum spend the whole time giving food to people from the food club and helping them work out what they need. And Peter is a welcome face. Always there with a "Happy Monday!" Even if it's a grey wet cold day!

The welcome café and the food club is a place of no questions asked... all are welcome. My job at the hub is to talk to people. To pray with people. To listen to people. But what I see mostly at the hub, is prisoner

I see...

Prisoners of addiction – A mum who has lost her children because she suffers from this terrible illness. A man who wants to stop drinking but can't because the shakes he feels are too much to handle.

Prisoners of homelessness – Men sleeping in tents around the city who are overwhelmed by the food that they are offered and the hugs they receive when no one else notices them.

Prisoners of domestic violence – Knowing that the hub is a safe place to be and finding comfort in prayer while trying to find the courage to leave.

Prisoners of self-harm – The lady who jokes constantly but tries to hide the scars.

Prisoners of grief – The sister who is losing her brother to dementia

Prisoners of Mental Health Issues – The curate who doesn't know how to support her cousin who has been admitted to a psychiatric hospital with psychosis.

These people are real people!

We are all prisoners trying to escape from things. And the hub on a Monday is a place where people can do just that. But these people are not prisoners of pity! They do not ask for pity. They are loved children of God!

“This man, too, is a son of Abraham” (Luke 19:9).

This man that the others had considered an outcast was to be restored as a brother. If Jesus were on earth today, would we find Him in the prisons, talking and dining with criminals and outcasts? Would we find him at the hub eating a lovely three-course meal cooked by our amazing cooks and talking with the homeless?

Of course we would.

He would be there “to seek and to save the lost” and to restore them to sonship, just as He did with Zacchaeus.

And because the Church is now His representative on earth, this is where we should be as well — calling the sick to the healing touch of our Lord and Savior; still recognizing in them the dignity of God's creation, no matter how far they have fallen, or what circumstances they find themselves in.

Trusting that no one — NO ONE — is beyond Christ's love and power to redeem.

Harvest is coming up in a few weeks. The hub needs food. But not just on a one off Sunday. It needs constant food, weekly giving, monthly giving. The hub needs people. Not just a one of pop in, but people willing to serve the people who need us the most. Weekly, monthly whatever. And if you can't afford to give food regularly, or you work or are not physically able to be there on a Monday. The hub on a Monday needs you to pray earnestly! Pray that there will always be enough food. Pray that there will always be enough volunteers. Pray for our brothers and sisters. Pray that an angel may just come along when they are bound in chains and there appears to be no way out. And pray that they may be set free from whatever is holding them prisoner at this time.

Thank you x