

Open our minds warm our hearts, but also bend our wills for we seek to hear your word. Amen.

My alarm sounded at 6:26 on Wednesday morning, church bells.

I had had some pretty anxious dreams the night before, but mornings don't care about that sort of thing. We've got one hour to wake, feed, and dress the household, and I hate to be late. At 7:37, I tied Tiel's shoes, and we were out the door. There were nerves welling up in my belly, but my trained brain was saying, this is okay. Everything's okay. This is a normal day. This is normal.

The walk from the bank parking lot to the school felt a lot longer on Wednesday. I held my son's little hand, I brushed his hair back from his forehead, at least a dozen times. And I told him I loved him enough for him to ask, "Why do you keep saying that? I know you love me, Mom." As I got closer to the school, I saw a line of teachers that had formed a front. A silent gesture that said, you'll have to go through us.

I exchanged some complicated, good mornings with the other parents before giving Tiel the biggest hug I could without going so far as to smother him with kisses in front of all of his friends. Then the bell rang 'Good Morning, PRM, this is principal Simpson here for your morning announcements.' They were shorter on Wednesday. And then the second bell rang signifying to us a time for meditation and prayer.

Every morning at my son's Montessori school in the Cincinnati public school district, they take two minutes to center themselves to begin a new day. A chance to embrace their school motto, peace, love, and PRM. Every child is given the opportunity to pray in their own way at school and no one is excluded from this time of daily reflection, I decided to stay with the teachers there in that place of prayer and together we begged God, "Please do not let this be their last day."

As the Easter season draws to a close, I am blown away by the innumerable similarities between the Apostles, the first Christians and us. All of these things that we've been highlighting in this season through our focus on the Book of Acts, as Peter read to us this morning. Just like those first followers of Jesus, we seek Good News in the midst of a troubled world. We struggle to preach peace in a violent society that is obsessed by greed and independent ego. Like those early Christians, we strive for something different, something loving something true. And we too ask the deep question of our hearts, 'what must I do to be saved?'

My seven-year-old son, and your seven-year-old son, and your seven-year-old grandson, and your seven-year-old niece, and your seven-year-old neighbor. They are currently being taught. They are learning from our society that if they want to be saved, that they need to turn off the lights, get low, barricade the doors, stay silent. And sacrifice themselves so that gun manufacturers can continue to make tons of money off of people's anxious fears of home invasion or worse, the pleasure at the sport of murder.

What must we do to be saved? What will shake us? What is our foundation? And will we believe on the Lord Jesus who came that we might have life and might have it more abundantly?

Our lesson from the Book of Acts today could be straight out of 2022. A young girl enslaved by anxious souls who are willing to pay, to predict a future unknown. Willing to sacrifice her in order to gain some semblance of control in a world where so much is out of our hands.

This servant girl recognizes servanthood in Paul and Silas too, but persistently and annoyingly reminds them that while they are both servants, they serve two very different viewpoints. Out of her owners love for money, this young woman is forced to serve fear, and Paul and Silas serve love.

Even long ago, serving love was an unpopular opinion. Even back then, love disturbed the city and advocated for customs that were contrary to the laws of the government. The loudest voices cried out in opposition, attack them. And these servants of God were stripped and beaten and thrown into prison.

Paul and Silas were made low. They were placed in a dark place, told to keep quiet, where the doors were barricaded, and they were held in chains. But then around midnight, something amazing happened. Because Paul and Silas started to pray, and they started to sing. *I don't feel no ways tired. I've come too far from where I started from. And nobody told me. That the road would be easy, but I don't believe you brought me this far to leave me.*

The earth began to shake at the sound of it. The sound of hope, of love. The sound of freedom, the sound of seeking and striving.

*I don't feel no ways tired. I've come too far from where I started from. And nobody told me that the road would be easy, but I don't believe you brought me this far to leave me.*

The doors of the prison were burst open. Their chains fell off and everyone was set free. Everyone, but one man. One man whose fear was held onto so tightly. The jailer. A man with no name, but his profession. A man shackled by his sense of duty to keep others in prison, ready to die in isolation. Ready to suffer loss of self out of fear. Ready to count himself as nothing, nothing more than what he could produce, prisoners.

But then, the Word of God broke in, do not harm yourself. We are all here and you are not alone.

These words of our forebearers, gave light to this man. You are not alone. Why had no one told him this before? How did he get so lost? How did he come to believe that he was nothing more than his job? Why on earth did he think that a sword would save him while his foundation of fear crumbled beneath him?

Why does it take an earthquake for us to see that God is greater than prison? That love is stronger than fear. What will shake us? What will shake us? And what must we do to be saved?

Paul and Silas tell us that our salvation comes from setting Jesus as the ruler of our hearts. Not money or fear or falsehood or violence or death, not these things, only love, only the truth of Jesus. Only love will be our salvation.

Our scriptures tell us that that night, those men walked out of that prison, and they washed each other's wounds. They both had them, and they washed each other's wounds, and they came together and they broke bread together and they rejoiced in their firm foundation of God and they moved forward together.

And they sang, they sang together. *I don't feel no ways tired. I've come too far from where I started from. And nobody told me that the road would be easy, but I don't believe you've brought us this far to leave us.*

Amen.