



The Strangest Jailbreak Ever

A sermon preached by the Rev. Stephanie Nagley, PhD at St. Luke's Bethesda on May 8, 2016

It was the strangest jailbreak ever. At about midnight Paul and Silas were singing hymns and praying to God. The other prisoners were listening. Suddenly there was an earthquake so violent that the foundation of the prison shook and the doors of the prison opened and everyone's chains fell off.

The jailer was beside himself. He knew that he would be blamed for their escape. He would be punished in the most painful way. His stomach churned. His eyes teared up. He drew his sword. In his mind there was no option but to kill himself. Paul yelled at him to stop. This was the strangest jailbreak ever. The prisoners were sitting just where the jailer left them. They didn't escape instead they stay and now they were saving his life.

A few months ago I listened to the Bishop of Texas, Andy Doyle, talk about another kind of jailbreak. He was referring to the modern day practice of jailbreaking iPhones. The process of removing the software restrictions that Apple put on their iPhones. People use jailbreak software so that they can open up the iPhone to other applications that Apple restricts. It's called jailbreaking. Bishop Doyle wondered what it would be like if we were to jailbreak the gospel. In other words, what would it be like us to take all the restrictions off of Jesus that time and customs have loaded on his work and words? What it would be like if we lived as the early followers lived with no preconceived notions of how it would turn out? What would it be like to sing and pray our way out of prison and still remain for those who needed to a new direction in their lives?

On this Mother's Day one of the greatest gifts I realize that my mother gave me was the ability to jailbreak my life. She had couple sayings that have helped me from time to time break free. In those times when I fuss and worry and stew about what others might be thinking of me --- a fussing and stewing and worrying that just gets in the way of being creative and moving forward --- I can hear my mother say, "What makes you think you're so important that people are actually thinking of you at all?" It sounds harsh, I know, but I can't tell you how many those words have saved my life.

When I was terrified at the thought of going to a new school and just wanted to pull the covers over my head and hide my mother said to me “There are always things we don’t do but we just have to do them anyway”. That counsel has freed me from a lot of prisons.

My mother isn’t driven to sentimentality. She is caring but she is blunt. Those two sayings of hers used to make me crazy. What I wanted was a cuddly “there, there, poor thing”. But “there, there, poor thing” is not in her repertoire. In her way she freed me to learn how to comfort myself and push forward and create a life.

Jesus wasn’t sentimental either. He told his followers that following him wasn’t going to be piece of cake. Some would be imprisoned, some would be stoned, others would be crucified. But even with all the hardship they would never be more free. In that freedom, they weren’t worried about what others thought of them, or if they would encounter resistance. They weren’t held back by new ideas or new practices or new people. They just got every day and moved forward.

It’s a little like what some of you have gone through recently. Some have sold a home and decided to downsize. You’ve had to part with decades of prized possessions that held fond memories. You’ve had to figure what to hold on to and what to let go of. Some of you have even hired a professional to help you downsize --- like my mother those professionals aren’t sentimental. But when it’s done what you’ve told me is that you feel free.

That’s what it is to follow Jesus to listen to your life, to let go of all and to trust, to really trust that God means what God has said since the beginning of time – you are loved and because God loves you all will be well, even when it isn’t.

What we have to offer to each other is the way to jailbreak our lives so that we can live those lives to the fullest, for the greatest good and to the glory of God. So that everyone can live knowing that all is well, even when it isn’t. There’s something in that knowing that gives us the courage to challenge what’s wrong in our world and do something about it. There’s something in that knowing that frees us to not care what others think but to just do the right thing. There’s something in that knowing that gets us to move despite our fear and move for and with the dream of God.

The invitation to share the bread and wine, no matter what, is our way of breaking free and breaking Jesus out of the restrictions placed on him over the centuries. It is our way of jailbreaking the mystery and magnificence of bread and wine so that all people will come to the table and at the table all people will be one as Jesus and God are one. It is our way shaking the foundations and loosening the chains.

The man who guarded Paul and Silas and their jailer went down to the river. He washed their wounds. They responded by baptizing him. Then they went to dinner at the jailer house. They sat together as one family. They sat and ate and drank the wine. They sat and ate and talked, laughed and rejoiced in the strangest jailbreak ever.

