**May 29, 2022 Acts 12:1-17**

***The Power of a Praying Church***

**Scripture:** *Acts 12:1-17 NRSV*

*(1)About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. (2)He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. (3)After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) (4)When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. (5)While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him. (6)The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. (7)Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his wrists. (8)The angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals." He did so. Then he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." (9)Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel's help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. (10)After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him. (11)Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." (12)As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying. (13)When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. (14)On recognizing Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. (15)They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she insisted that it was so. They said, "It is his angel." (16)Meanwhile Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the gate, they saw him and were amazed. (17)He motioned to them with his hand to be silent, and described for them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he added, "Tell this to James and to the believers." Then he left and went to another place.*

**Notes:**

1. The ***power*** of a praying church.
   1. ***Much Prayer = Much Power***,
   2. ***Little Prayer = Little Power***,
   3. ***No Prayer = No Power***.
2. When you pray regularly, ***irregular*** things happen on a regular basis.
   1. ***Am*** ***I*** praying as I ought to pray?
   2. ***Are*** ***we*** praying as we ought to pray?
   3. ***Are*** ***you*** praying as you ought to pray?
   4. intercessory prayer are prayers offered to ***God***, For ***others***, by the members of the ***Church***.
3. God ***stands*** **beside** us, just as he stood beside Peter in the prison!
   1. God is ***responding*** to the prayers of the church.
   2. The ***church*** was praying!!
4. Ask God to give us; the ***grace*** to sustain, the **strength** to stand firm, the ***willpower*** to keep on keeping on.
   1. Why should we be ***surprised*** when the things we pray for are realized?
   2. The Lord answers prayer, ***faithfully***.
5. Perhaps it’s time to pray, “get me ***through*** prayers”.
   1. Hold on to Jesus. Don’t let go. Jesus will get you ***out*** and He will get you ***through***.

**Script:**

Have you ever had a dream that seemed so real, that you wondered afterwards whether the experience might have actually happened? I myself am a vivid dreamer. I remember dreams that scared the daylights out of me; some which worried me; others which I believe were calling me to projects of God, and others that were just fun, like a rollercoaster ride. Occasionally I would have a dream and somewhere down the road, the events of my dream actually take place, they call this phenomenon Déjàvu. It's like God is placing in your mind an event that is going to take place so you may be prepared for it.

Are you the type of person who remembers their dreams? Have you ever experienced deja vu? Have you ever experienced an event that seemed like a dream; you know you pinch yourself to make sure you are awake and it hurts?

That’s what happened to Peter in Acts chapter 12. It begins and he thinks he is dreaming, but as the event continues, Peter realizes that this is for real. I am sure many of you will recognize the story but bear with me as I share it with you, stand with me in the reading of Acts 12:1-17

***Acts 12:1-17 NRSV*** *(1)About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. (2)He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. (3)After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) (4)When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. (5)While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him. (6)The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. (7)Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his wrists. (8)The angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals." He did so. Then he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." (9)Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel's help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. (10)After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him. (11)Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." (12)As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying. (13)When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. (14)On recognizing Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. (15)They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she insisted that it was so. They said, "It is his angel." (16)Meanwhile Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the gate, they saw him and were amazed. (17)He motioned to them with his hand to be silent, and described for them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he added, "Tell this to James and to the believers." Then he left and went to another place.*

This morning we are going to look at the power of a praying church. As I prepared this week, I read something Pastor Daryl Blank, pastor of the Springdale Church of the Nazarene shared. He shared that his grandfather used to say ***Much Prayer = Much Power***, ***Little Prayer = Little Power***, ***No Prayer = No Power***. Prayer is a powerful weapon. It’s like a missile. It can be aimed anywhere in the world and it hits its target faster than the speed of light, one could say it reaches its target at the speed of thought, *every single time*. Prayer is an evangelistic tool. Your children can tune you out. Your neighbors can slam the door in your face. But they cannot keep the Holy Spirit from knocking at their heart’s door in response to your prayers.

When you pray regularly, irregular things happen on a regular basis. I want to ask three questions this morning; three questions you should take into consideration and reflect upon in your daily life. 1. Am I praying as I ought to prayer? 2. Are we praying as we ought to pray? 3. Are you praying as you ought to pray? Let’s take another look at our scripture in Acts chapter 12.

*Acts 12:1-5 NRSV (1)About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. (2)He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. (3)After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) (4)When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. (5)While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him.*

In verse 5 we see the heart of intercessory prayer. Peter was “in prison, but constant prayer was offered To God, For Him, By the Church”. Every Sunday morning, we have a time of intercessory prayer in our morning worship services; on Wednesday we hold a prayer meeting where we meet and share testimonies and prayer concerns and we have a time of intercessory prayer; and then on Wednesday Evening at the end of our small group meeting we have another time of intercessory prayer. Some may ask, what is intercessory prayer; intercessory prayer are prayers offered to God, For others, by the members of the Church. It is our opportunity to step in for others and ask the Lord to take care of a person’s or group’s needs. As we go through this passage, we will see that the church was not just offering token prayers or lip service. They were serious about praying and their prayers did in fact, make a difference.

As we continue with verse 6 we find Herod about to bring Peter forward to be executed; but before Herod has a chance to send for him something incredible happens. Peter is sleeping, chained to two guards, one on his right and one on his left, the three are chained together. And standing at the entrance of the cell are two other guards who are to keep watch. Did you catch that one thing that seems extraordinary; Peter is sleeping? In prison? The night before he is to executed and die? How is that possible, it is not possible without the confidence and trust you have in your Lord and Savior. Peter is demonstrating incredible trust and confidence in God.

The Apostle Paul tells us, *“ (6)Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (7)And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7”* Peter is sleeping!! God gave him a peace that surpasses understanding. And what is the church doing? If you look back to verse 5, They are praying. This causes me to pause and consider, *Am I praying as I ought to pray? Are we praying as we ought to pray? Are you praying as you ought to pray?*

So what happens next, in verse 7 we find that and angel of the Lord is standing next to Peter; and a light shines around them. The angel strikes Peter on his side, lifting him up into the air and tells him to rise up quickly; and with that his chains are gone, he’s been set free. Isn’t that amazing grace?

The passage says the angel of the Lord stood by him; this gives me memories of another instance when God’s servants were about to be killed and another figure was present with them; remember Hebrew children in the book of Daniel who refused to bow down to the King. After they were thrown into the fiery furnace, King Nebuchadnezzar looked in and asked *"Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?" They answered the king, "True, O king." (25) He replied, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god. Daniel 3:24-25 "*

God stood beside these men just as he stood beside Peter in the prison! And just like he stands beside us, each of us, you and me. He promises to never leave us or forsake us! In Isaiah 43, God says, *“(2)When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. (3)For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”*

Even in prison God is standing beside Peter; verse 7 says the angel, struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, “Arise quickly!” And his chains fell off *his* hands. This deliverance inspired Charles Wesley to write “My Chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth and followed Thee.” *(And Can it Be, that I Should Gain 1738)* Look how God is responding to the prayers of the church as they intercede for Peter. When I read this, I have to ask, Am I praying as I ought to pray? Are we praying as we ought to pray? Are you praying as you ought to pray?

Verse 8 “*Then the angel said to him, “Gird yourself and tie on your sandals”; and so, he did. And he said to him, “Put on your garment and follow me. So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.”*

The angel tells him to put on his belt and sandals, and to wrap his cloak around him. Now let me say if this is me in this situation I am totally disheveled; I am confused and acting dumbfounded. Peter is most likely thinking he is in a dream! Of course wouldn’t any of us in this type of situation think the same way. Peter walks out of the jail cell with the angel and they pass two guard stations. When they arrive at the Iron gate that leads to the rest of the city, the gate opens for him, all by itself. They continue down the street and after they travel one street away the angel leaves his sight. What do you do next where do you go? Up until this moment in this story, the angel is making all of the decisions. DO you run for another country? Do you just leave town? It takes Peter a moment to get his bearings back. That is when he realizes this is not a dream; an angel of the Lord did in fact release him from prison and emanate death, saving his life. We are now at verse 12, and Peter is starting to make sense of this situation and finds himself at the home of Mary the mother of John Mark. Do you know what they were doing inside this home? A church potluck, no… A family game night?, no…

They were having a good old fashioned prayer meeting.They were gathered together PRAYING! No lip service in this church. It was in the middle of the night! But remember verse 5? Peter was in prison but constant prayers were being offered to God for Peter by the church! The church was praying!! Look what happens next, I think this is hilarious and it is truly great!

*(13)When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. (14)On recognizing Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. (15)They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she insisted that it was so. They said, "It is his angel."* *Acts 12:13-15 NRSV*

I love this! The church is knocking at heaven’s door with a request and God is knocking at their door with the answer. Peter is standing at the gate, knocking! The maid is so excited she doesn’t let Peter in, but runs back to the group to tell them Peter is there. The don’t believe her, in fact they say she is crazy! This makes me question- Am I praying as I ought to pray? Are we praying as we ought to pray? Are you praying as you ought to pray? And, where is Peter? Peter is still standing at the gate knocking and waiting for somebody to let him in. When the people realize that He is still at the gate somebody goes and lets him in. One version says, they were amazed! Another says they were astonished! I am wondering why? What did they expect from their prayers? What were they truly praying for? I have to agree with the statement that was shared at the beginning this morning: Much Prayer does equal Much Power! Doesn’t this make you want to pray? I want to be a man of faith. I want to be a man of prayer. I confess, sometimes I try it in my own strength. I try to fix it myself. I wish I had the forethought to start with God, but sometimes I only ask for his help AFTER I’ve tried it my way.

We tend to pray two different kinds of prayers. 1. Get me out prayers 2. Get me through prayers “Get me out prayers” are praying for God to help us out of a problem or circumstance. “Get me out of this job”. “Get me out of this financial mess”. “Get our church out of debt”. “Get me out!” Last Sunday I went for a motorcycle ride and got stuck in a rainstorm. I knew that we were heading into what looked to be rain but I didn’t take the proper precautions and found myself having a difficult time seeing where I was going; and I said one of these “get me out of this” prayers. But it kept on raining So we stopped and I made some adjustments and got back on the road. “Get me out of this” prayers are good prayers. There is nothing wrong with them. The church was praying Get Peter Out! And God answered in a miraculous way.

But then there are “get me through prayers”- In addition to praying for deliverance, we need to learn prevailing prayers. We need to ask God to give us the grace to sustain, the strength to stand firm, the willpower to keep on keeping on. There is a difference between “praying out” and “praying through”. As I pulled out of the bank overhang in Beaverdale last Sunday, I offered up a small “Get me through this” prayer. Before long the rain eased up, the road began to look less wet, and I began to feel less anxious. Was this an answer to prayer? You betcha. Why should we be surprised when the things we pray for are realized? Why should we play down the different ways that the Lord answers our prayers? I have said this many times and many of you know this; the Lord answers prayer, faithfully; it is not always in the way we want or expect; but the prayer is answered just the same.

Some of you have been going through the same struggles for the last three years. Between the pandemic, the financial woes of our country, the rising cost of groceries and gas; We have had our fair share of struggles. I am willing to bet that you’ve prayed a lot of “Get me out prayers”. Perhaps it’s time to pray, “get me through prayers”.

For whatever reason, for reasons I cannot explain to you, perhaps God is allowing you to go through this trial, these times of trials, to build character. To teach you something, to strengthen your resolve, to minister to someone else, to be a witness of his grace. Whatever the reason, he hasn’t got you out, so asking God to get you through would be an appropriate prayer today.

Many of you are going through a difficult season right now. But I have confidence that God will get you through if you keep your eyes on him.

Every discouraging time I have had in my life has been when I took my eyes off Jesus and put them on my circumstances. Storms deplete our tanks. When your tanks are empty, aka spiritual tank, financial tank, emotional tank, love tank. You lose perspective. And in the middle of the storm the enemy comes along and whispers, “I think you should quit”, “Why bother”, “You’re not gonna make it”, “No one cares”.

Listen to me! I have come up here this morning to tell you Satan is a liar. You shouldn’t quit. You shouldn’t give up. Hold on to Jesus. Don’t let go. Jesus will get you out and He will get you through. If there is anyone who can help you in a storm. If there is anyone who can keep you from ruining your life, it is Jesus Christ.

So let me ask you again, Are we praying as we ought to pray? Are you praying as you ought to pray? Let’s gather around these altars this morning. Bring your family. Let’s unite our prayers together. Do you have sin to confess? Are you in need of God's strength and power? Come and let us pray with you. Let’s pray for our church and denomination. Let’s intercede for our prodigal sons and daughters. Come and talk with Jesus. Much prayer = Much Power

Jesus said, “My house shall be called a house of prayer” Let’s make it a house of prayer this morning.