

“Easter: Prison Break?”

Date: April 24, 2011

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Matthew 28:1-10

Theme: Easter, New Life, Liberation

Occasion: Easter Sunday

Christ is alive! Can I get a witness? Hallelujah! Have I told you that Easter is my favorite holiday of the entire year? I look forward to preaching on this Sunday more than any other occasion. Oh, it is so glorious!

If Christ is alive, why aren't we more alive? Why don't we feel more alive this morning? One possible explanation is the word *agoraphobia*. Ever heard of it? Have you ever known someone who had it? Of all the dozens of phobias a person can suffer from, one of the most debilitating is the fear of open spaces: Agoraphobia.

One woman, born and raised in the Midwest, described how she felt exposed, uncomfortable, as if she was going to fall off the edge of the world, when she moved to the Pacific coast. The ocean expanse was too vast, too open-ended. It left her feeling out of control. She had to move back to the Midwest.

Other agoraphobic people have anxiety attacks when they venture out into the world. For many, the phobia gets so bad that they never do - and they become the ultimate “stay at home.” The Internet has made it easier for these folks to feel connected to the outside world.

However, their online existence cannot hide the fact that some people are prisoners in their own homes. Their fears keep them trapped behind the walls of their homes, just as surely as the walls of a prison keep the convicted behind bars and barbed wire.

Here in the United States of America, agoraphobics have a lot of fellow

non-travelers. While the U.S. has just 5% of the world's population, we hold **20%** of the world's population of prisoners. Our prisoner statistics are staggering. Did you know this about the U.S.? 1 in 8 men has been convicted of a felon. 1 in 20 men have gone to jail. 1 in 5 African-American men have been in prison. In fact, more than 700 out of every 100,000 residents in USA are behind prison bars.

But here's our problem: There are a lot more "prisoners" in our communities and our country than can be counted in the prison system. Like those suffering from agoraphobia, these prisons exist without bars, and they lock us in and lock us down just as effectively. Let's name some of those prisons this Easter morning:

There are prisoners of poverty..... prisoners of ignorance.... prisoners of rage...
prisoners of neglect... prisoners of addiction.....prisoners of hate...prisoners of despair....prisoners of loneliness....prisoners of fear. All of these prisons, the hundreds of others that our sinful, broken selves can create, all work to make it *worse!*

That is why the story of Easter is such Good News! The resurrection is the ultimate "prison break!" Jesus breaks free from death. Jesus breaks the chain of sin and condemnation that stretched all the way back to Adam. Jesus' prison break offers us all a way to escape the solitary confinement of the self.

Like any good prison break, Jesus' escape from death went undetected by his jailors. When the two Marys arrive at the tomb early in the morning, the guards stand in front of the bulky boulder that blocks entry and exit from the grave. Then the angel appears, as "striking" as "lightning," dressed in robes as "white as snow."

The angel flexes some celestial muscle and rolls the stone away from the

tomb. “Check it out,” the angel challenges the women. “He is not here! He is risen!”

Jesus’ prison break is secret no more. The angel trumpets the announcement: “He has been raised from the dead.”

But that is not all of the angel’s message. Not only is Jesus not in the tomb, not dead. Jesus is “going ahead of you to Galilee.” Jesus isn’t just out of the tomb, He is “*on the road again,*” to quote Willie Nelson.

Now that Jesus has broken out of the prison of death, now that the victory over evil and suffering has been won, the women are told to herald this news to the other disciples. And once they have done that, they are all to get themselves to Galilee, to meet up with the risen Christ.

In our text this Easter morning, Jesus’ prison break enables the women to break free of their mourning, their fear, their self-pity and their lack of faith. The resurrection of our Lord, Jesus’ prison break, if you will, breaks free these first witnesses to take discipleship action. They are free to DO. They are free to TELL. They are free to FOLLOW Jesus, to a new beginning of faith.

Jesus releases us from whatever prisons we find ourselves in. For some of us it is *metal* bars that keep us captive. For some of us, it is **mental** barriers that keep us captive. But whether metal bars or mental barriers, this morning we can shout to the heavens, “We are free. We are free. We are free at last!”

In Christ Jesus, you have been broken out of the prisons that confine you. Now, leave and meet up with Jesus on the road, where He’s waiting for you.

A story: Fritz Kreisler was a world famous violinist (born 1875, died 1962). He earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions, but he generously gave most of it away. So, when he discovered an exquisite violin on one of his trips, he

wasn't able to buy it. Later, having raised enough money to meet the asking price, he returned to the seller, hoping to purchase that beautiful instrument. To his great dismay, it had been sold to an antique dealer.

Kreisler made his way to the new owner's home and offered to buy the violin. The rare instrument was proudly displayed behind a sealed and solid glass case. Resting in its velvet pouch, the violin lay imprisoned in its climate controlled coffin. The collector said that it had become his prized possession, and he would not sell it.

Keenly disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave, when he had an idea. "Could I play the instrument once more before its consigned to silence?" he asked. Permission was granted, and the great virtuoso released the violin from its fancy casket and filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector's emotions were deeply stirred.

"I have no right to keep that to myself" the collector exclaimed. "It's yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it into the world and let people hear it."

My friends, God created you as an exquisite instrument. God designed you to make beautiful music. Don't imprison the gift of life which Christ has given to you. In Christ, you have been set free. Jesus said, "Because I live, you also will live."
(John 14:19)

Go into the world, and by your lives let the music of Easter go forth into the world. The hills are alive with the sound of music. And so are the streets and the highways and the bi-ways. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Share the good news. Christ has overcome the grave. He has broken free from the jail of the tomb. And to all who put their faith in Him, they too are set free. Proclaim the good news to the poor, and release to the captives. Set free the

prisoners of poverty, and the prisoners of addiction, and the prisoners of hatred, and the prisoners of loneliness, and the prisoners of fear.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! And to all who put their faith in Him, they too are set free. Easter is the ultimate jail break! Sing the song of freedom with you life! Amen! Amen! Amen!