

NORTH MAIN SERMON MAY 25, 2025

Acts 16:16-31 Paul and Silas in Prison

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her. ¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” ²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!” ²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what

must I do to be saved?” ³¹ They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

John 14:1-29

Jesus Comforts His Disciples (I say this Reading at every funeral)

14 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God^[a]; believe also in me. ² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know^[b] my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” ⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be^[c] in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” ²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?” ²³ Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. ²⁵ “All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. ²⁸ “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. This is the Word of God for the People of God.

"Remember" The Time is Drawing Near

The disciples have followed Jesus throughout his ministry, yet remained fundamentally confused about his mission. Even after the

resurrection, they still required Jesus to "open their minds" to understand the scriptures. Their inability to fully comprehend extends throughout the gospels, where they consistently fail to grasp Jesus's true mission, expecting political restoration rather than spiritual transformation. In the Gospel reading from John, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his imminent departure. The shadow of the cross still looms, and although the resurrection followed and the disciples saw him again, Jesus knows he will soon ascend to the Father. The disciples face profound loss and uncertainty. They have built their lives around following Jesus—abandoning careers, homes, and security—and now their teacher speaks of leaving them. Their anxious hearts struggle to comprehend this disruption to their expectations. They face the troubling prospect of continuing without Jesus's physical presence in a hostile world that had rejected him and would soon reject them. Their fear, confusion, and sense of abandonment resonates with contemporary experiences of loss. Jesus acknowledges their troubled hearts in this Scripture reading for today as I try to show people when they lose someone, showing that their distress matters to him even as he prepares to depart. Losing someone should matter to all of us. Losing someone is hard. All of us at one time or another have lost someone in our lives, someone truly dear to us. Perhaps through death, perhaps through the ending of a relationship. No matter how we have lost someone, our brains will go through a complicated process that we call grief. Grief essentially means we are trying to adapt to a new reality in which someone who was a significant part of our everyday lives now is gone.

Human beings are relational creatures. We understand our own sense of loss through our relationships with others. That's why when we lose someone close to us, we also feel that we've lost somehow a part of ourselves. In a sense, we have. A good part of grief means re-assessing who we are without that person. We spend time often re-evaluating our lives, our beliefs, and the relationship we had with that person. We re-live memories, and we try to come to terms with

our new place in the world and how that significant relationship will impact us going forward.

If you have lost someone you had a close relationship with, you may come out of your grief with a different sense of self, purpose, and learning for your future. No matter what kind of relationship it was, you will go through a grieving process. Like the disciples, we live amid profound uncertainty, often feeling spiritually abandoned or directionless. Our troubled hearts manifest as anxiety, depression, or constant distraction. We seek peace, yet, ultimately anything we try to relieve our grief usually fails us. Many feel isolated in their struggles, unable to name their fears openly. We long for genuine peace. And yet, Anxiety disorders affect over 40 million American adults, reflecting a society struggling to find genuine peace.

- God, knowing the disciples' troubled hearts, doesn't leave them orphaned or alone. And he doesn't leave us alone either. Jesus promises the Father will send the Holy Spirit—the Advocate, Counselor, and Comforter—who will teach them and remind them of everything Jesus has said. As I also tell people at funeral services, God will not abandon us either. This is no temporary fix but the permanent indwelling of God's presence. The peace Jesus offers isn't worldly tranquility dependent on circumstances, but rather divine peace that transcends understanding—the same peace that allowed Jesus to face the cross with resolve. This peace is God's gift, not something the disciples must manufacture through their own spiritual discipline or moral effort. Jesus gives his peace as a gift. He simply says "My peace I give you." Jesus commands "do not let your hearts be troubled" after providing the basis for peace. God continues to send the Holy Spirit today, bringing divine peace to troubled hearts amid life's uncertainties. This peace doesn't require perfect circumstances but flows from God's presence with us in all situations. The Spirit teaches us through Scripture, worship, community, and prayer, reminding us of Jesus's words and promises when we forget them in our anxiety. God's peace transforms how we navigate difficulties, not by removing them but by providing divine companionship within them. The same Spirit who comforted the first

disciples comforts believers today with the certainty of Peace .. and that is God's unfailing love. There are ways to help yourself find peace through Scripture, as people support one another through difficult times.

If you are as anxious and worried as the disciples were. Consider today these things Jesus said to the disciples before he ascended to his Father.."I see your troubled heart, and I have not left you alone. My Spirit is with you now—teaching, guiding, and bringing my words to your remembrance when you need them most." "The peace I give is not fragile like the world's temporary calm. My peace runs deeper than your circumstances, anchored in my unchanging love for you. Let your heart rest in this certainty." "I am sending my Spirit to you as your Advocate and Counselor. When you feel lost or confused, remember that my guidance is within you, leading you into all truth." "Do not let your heart be troubled or afraid. I am not distant from your pain. I have experienced human suffering myself, and now my Spirit brings my comforting presence directly into your uncertainty."... Remember we are Easter people with new hope and peace.. Carry the Easter tokens you have as a reminder that God's peace is with you as Easter People, who are called to work for peace.

Pass the Peace at the end of the service..