

Reflection for 22/06/20
From Reader Margaret Enger

St. Paul in lockdown, part 1

*“Praise. My soul, the King of heaven,
To his feet thy tribute bring;
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
who like me his praise should sing?
Alleluia, Alleluia,
Praise the everlasting King.” **

Is that how you began lockdown?

Lockdown, stay at home, self-isolation, shielding, social distancing ... what negative phrases they all are and how tempting it was to moan, groan, rebel. Especially so for those of us over 70: what had we done so wrong in living past that special birthday? It felt for many like being punished for living too long. So we moaned when we should have sung praises to God; when we should have been counting our blessings instead of our complaints.

Let's take a look at Paul's example in Acts chapter 16 from verse 16 to the end of the chapter.

Paul and Silas had been in Philippi some time preaching the Gospel and had been bothered by a young slave woman who kept calling out “These men are servants of the most high God who are telling you the way to be saved.” She had made a lot of money for her owners by fortune telling and they were so angry when Paul silenced her that they stirred up the crowd to attack Paul and Silas. The magistrates had them stripped and flogged and thrown into prison. And what did they do, hurting and in gaol? They prayed and sang hymns!

Around midnight there was an earthquake, the prison doors flew open and the prisoners' chains fell off. The gaoler was terrified that he would be held responsible for the prisoners escaping, but Paul called out to him not to worry; they were all still there. He came, trembling, and asked what he should do to be saved. They told him to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The gaoler took them to his own home, tended to their wounds and gave them a meal.

The next day the magistrates sent word to let Paul and Silas go. And only then did Paul exercise his rights as a Roman citizen. “No way”, he said, “they flogged us and had us put in gaol without trial although we are Roman citizens and now they want to send us away secretly. Let them come in person and escort us out of their city.” Paul did not just preach that we should give thanks in everything; he showed us by example how to do just that. Now it seems that the lockdown restrictions will be easing. We are looking forward to socialising more, seeing more of our families, even hugging our children and grandchildren. But there will still be huge adjustments to make. We shall not be back to normal if, by that, we mean as things used to be, for a very long time, if ever. The way out may well prove more testing

than the way into lockdown did. Growth and change always go hand in hand and we must be prepared. And so, let us look to whatever the future holds for us with faith and hope, and never forget the praise.

*“Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
Praise him all creatures here below,
Praise him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.” ***

* H.F.Lyte 1793-1847

** Thomas Ken 1637-1711