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The Baptism of Our Lord

Acts 16:25-34

## BAPTISM'S GRACE IS EVEN FOR YOU

So often you feel like the odd man out, the person on the outside. Even if you hang with a certain group you feel like the one who really doesn't fit in, the one who's different. Does anyone know you feel that way? Would they be surprised? Though it might be felt most keenly in high school, you may be as self-conscious about it in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, or among a group of young moms, or at the company Christmas party, or even within your own family.

Maybe one place you feel it more than anywhere else is at church, among fellow Christians. You are not like other Christians. They seem to have it together. They have all this faith in God, all this knowledge about the Bible. They're at ease with religious talk and worshipping settings. They seem happy. They live these wholesome, rosy lives. They don't have your struggles. You're not so comfortable talking religion or singing religious

songs, you don't have all this familiarity they seem to have. Your life isn't a detergent-washed display of niceness. You're way less noble. Way less certain. They might even be shocked to know what you're really like, where your mind really is most of the time. You're not one of them.

In the reading from Acts 16, God holds before us an example of a man who really, really didn't belong, a man who truly was on the outside and could not, should not, have expected to fit in as one of God's people. It was the jailor in the town of Philippi. Using the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, God revealed something completely unexpected. Baptism's grace was even for him. And so it is for you, regardless of who you are, Baptism's grace is even for you.

Paul and Silas were on a missionary journey. They were working to establish a congregation in the city of Philippi. During their time there, a demon-possessed girl made it hard for them to work. She followed them around shouting and causing a scene. Finally, Paul commanded the demon to come out of her. This angered some men in the town who had made money off this girl using her as a fortune teller. As a result, they stirred up a riot in the city and lynched Paul and

Silas as the troublemakers. Without a trial, the city officials had Paul and Silas arrested, severely whipped and then sent to prison.

Enter the jailor. A more unlikely candidate for the Kingdom of God it would be hard to find. A harsh man, a cruel man -he took Paul and Silas with their torn and bleeding backs and locked their feet in stocks deep within the cold prison. So calloused was he that he went to sleep unconcerned for their suffering. A native Gentile, someone who had no familiarity with the Jewish faith or the true God and certainly had no knowledge whatsoever of Jesus or Christianity. A completely selfish man -for even when the foundations of the prison were shaken and the prisoners set free, he was about to take his own life to avoid punishment. When he fell down at the feet of Paul and Silas, crying out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved," don't imagine that was some noble inquiry of a pure heart. It was a wretched, despicable man with no redeeming qualities who had hit rock bottom crying out in fear.

One of the many miracles of this story is that Paul and Silas willingly, without any resentment or hesitation, were willing to invite the jailor to trust in Jesus and be saved. After all the unfair treatment, their shirts still

glued to their backs with caked blood, ankles bruised and stiff from the stocks, their attitude toward the man is a greater miracle than the earthquake, a greater miracle than the building being rocked off its foundation, the doors all flying open and the chains dropping off of every wrist and ankle.

The apostle Paul, whose past also included cruelty against Christianity, certainly acted consistently with his personal conviction: *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners -of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.*

Who was Paul to deny the same treatment to this unbelieving jailor? Jesus is a Savior who reaches out to sinners and takes them in to His Family. He is the God of amazing grace who shows mercy, saves and befriends the outsiders, the unlikely and the undeserving.

But it was so much more that Christ did. The Bible says, *God demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were still sinners Christ died for us.* Christ

allowed the skin on His own back to be torn. He suffered alone in the darkness under God's damning judgment as He hung on the cross. Christ sacrificed His own life. Not so that He could escape punishment, but all so that we could escape God's punishment.

And now Christ lives to set us free. Consider how easily, how freely Christ does it. Paul said nothing to the jailor, not a hint of having to invite the Lord Jesus into your heart, or turning your life over to Him or reciting the "sinner's prayer" as though Jesus did His part, now you have to do your part. The onus was not on the jailor to be saved. The onus was on Jesus to save him. Paul simply said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." Jesus has done everything. Believe that He has saved you, that He is your Friend, that He does include you in His salvation plan for it is already true.

To make you all the more sure that He intends this grace for you, that you are not the odd man out, but that you are included in His grace -look to your Baptism. This is the assurance Paul and Silas gave to the jailor and his family. Acts 16 tells us, *At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The*

*jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and the whole family was filled with joy, because they had come to believe in God.*

Consider the miraculous exchange. The jailor used water to wash their wounds. Paul used water in Baptism to wash away the jailor's sins. The jailor poured water on their backs. Through Baptism, God poured the Holy Spirit on the jailor. Paul and Silas were released from a prison of stone. Through Baptism, the jailor was released from the prison of sin and death. The jailor who had heartlessly locked them up in a dungeon, now invited them into his house. The foreigners Paul and Silas were joyfully welcomed by the jailor's family. Through Baptism, the pagan jailor was welcomed into the family of God. The jailor set a meal before Paul and Silas. In Baptism, God filled up the jailor with righteousness and Christ's peace.

The good news of God's grace in connection with Jesus is for you also. Believe it for yourself, because by God's command it is freely and abundantly announced and proclaimed to you. But so that you could be assured all the more that God intends this message for you personally, through the mouth of the minister God called you by name in Holy Baptism. In that Sacrament

He washed your sins away. He rescued you from death and the devil. He gave birth to a new life in you -a life under God's friendship. He set you on a path to heaven's glory. He adopted you into His Family. Perhaps you even have a certificate on which is written the date that God pour all these blessings onto you in that Sacrament. Be assured, even if you feel like someone on the outside, even if you feel like you're not sure if you belong to the Christian-world, even if you are the most unlikely person to be saved, as unlikely as the jailor in Philippi, know and believe that Baptism's grace is even for you.