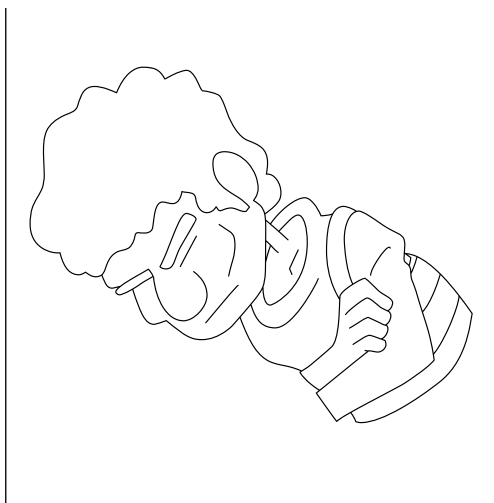


Peter in prison



Colour me!



Acts 12:3b–16

Herod had Peter arrested during the Festival of Thin Bread. He put Peter in jail and ordered four squads of soldiers to guard him. Herod planned to put him on trial in public after the festival. While Peter was being kept in jail, the church never stopped praying to God for him.

The night before Peter was to be put on trial, he was asleep and bound by two chains. A soldier was guarding him on each side, and two other soldiers were guarding the entrance to the jail. Suddenly an angel from the Lord appeared, and light flashed around in the cell. The angel poked Peter in the side and woke him up. Then he said, "Quick! Get up!" The chains fell off his hands, and the angel said, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." Peter did what he was told. Then the angel said, "Now put on your coat and follow me." Peter left with the angel, but he thought everything was only a dream. They went past the two groups of soldiers, and when they came to the iron gate to the city, it opened by itself. They went out and were going along the street, when all at once the angel disappeared.

Peter now realized what had happened, and he said, "I am certain that the Lord sent his angel to rescue me from Herod and from everything the Jewish leaders planned to do to me." Then Peter went to the house of Mary the mother of John whose other name was Mark. Many of the Lord's followers had come together there and were praying. Peter knocked on the gate, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer. When she heard Peter's voice, she was too excited to open the gate. She ran back into the house and said that Peter was standing there. "You are mad!" everyone told her. But she kept saying that it was Peter. Then they said, "It must be his angel." But Peter kept on knocking, until finally they opened the gate. They saw him and were completely amazed.

Commentary

The name of Herod keeps coming up in the New Testament, and each member of this infamous family seems to have been as power-mad and unpredictable as the others. King Herod the Great murdered children in his attempt to get rid of Jesus as a baby, his son had John the Baptist killed, and now his grandson is attacking the church. He has executed James, and now Peter has been arrested and is awaiting trial.

It is Passover time—twelve years after the first Easter—so is Peter going to be killed just like his Lord? The church believes in the power of prayer, however, and an amazing miracle occurs. An angel releases Peter from his chains, walks him past the guards and takes him through locked gates. The funny thing is that when Peter does arrive at Mary's home, the disciples can't believe the answer to their own prayers, and Rhoda leaves Peter outside while she tries to convince them it's really him.

God clearly still had work for Peter to do; it wasn't time for him to die just yet. In fact, he continued to lead the church in Jerusalem and Judea for a long while and then travelled west, ending up in Rome before Jesus called him home to heaven.

Questions

- ▶ How do you imagine the disciples reacted to the news of what happened to James?
- ▶ Why did God rescue Peter and not James?
- ▶ How daring are our prayers? And do we believe God will really answer?
- ▶ Can you imagine how Peter felt, left outside when Rhoda forgot to open the door?



Visual aid

Use a chain and a padlock to represent the chains that held Peter and the locked iron gate through which he passed with the angel.



Activity idea

Perhaps you have a set of those metal puzzles that you have to disentangle carefully, following a certain sequence. Alternatively, use a combination lock from a case or a bike lock. Give some clues to the others as to what the code might be and see how long it takes for them to break the combination. Imagine how Peter must have felt when the chains broke and the lock gave way.



Prayer idea

The church in Mary's house had seen many amazing answers to prayer, but this time it must have seemed like praying to move a mountain. Write your special prayers for today on strips of paper bent round into loops and interlocked to make a prayer chain.

Key verse

While Peter was being kept in jail, the church never stopped praying to God for him (Acts 12:5).

Old Testament story link

Psalm 130: The first Christians often used the Psalms to help them pray. Perhaps Rhoda, Mary and their friends used the words of this Psalm when they prayed for Peter.



