

¹ About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. ² He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. ³ After he saw that it pleased the Jewish leadership, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the Festival of Unleavened Bread.) ⁴ When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. ⁵ While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him. ⁶ The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. ⁷ Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his wrists. ⁸ The angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals." He did so. Then he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." ⁹ Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel's help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him. ¹¹ Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." ¹² As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many had gathered and were praying. ¹³ When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ On recognizing Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. ¹⁵ They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she insisted that it was so. They said, "It is his angel." ¹⁶ Meanwhile Peter continued knocking, and when they opened the gate they saw him and were amazed. ¹⁷ He motioned to them with his hand to be silent and described for them how the Lord had brought him out of prison. And he added, "Tell this to James and to the brothers and sisters." Then he left and went to another place.

Response to the Word

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Acts 12:1-17

05/03/2026 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

Sermon Series, Part III: Serve Joyfully

Rev. Amy Terhune

Let me open by telling you that Pastor Amy is very sorry she's not here today. She is home recovering from a pretty rough case of Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), but these are her words and I'm the delivery system today.

One of the core tenants of Christian faith in the protestant tradition is that we are saved by faith alone. Salvation by faith alone – or *Sola fide* – holds that sinners are justified before God solely by trusting in the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and not through personal good works or human efforts. We understand salvation to be a free gift of God's grace rather than something we earn. Grace pervades all we do. God's free, unmerited gift of grace levels the playing field, reminding us that we are all sinners and that all of us are redeemed by faith in Christ alone.

But this doesn't mean that good work has no place in the life of faith. John Wesley taught us that genuine faith produces a change in the heart that invariably leads to action. The sun rises in the east, 2 + 2 is 4, and faith will lead one to act in the world on behalf of others. For John Wesley, these were indisputable facts. And still today those of us who look to John Wesley for wisdom on how to be a follower of Jesus Christ continue to accept the premise that faith in the heart produces work with our hands, our

time, our dollars. Faith cannot long stay in the head and remain life-giving. We are called to service. That is the fruit of our faith.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus knelt in front of his friends and washed their stinky, dirty, disgusting feet. And as he did so, he reminded them that He had come, not to be served, but to serve and to give his life for many. He calls us to do as he does. And he reminded them that any who would be truly great must become a servant of all. Wall Street may measure greatness by net worth, Hollywood may measure greatness by name recognition, and Washington DC may measure greatness by political clout, but Jesus measured greatness by service – by living what we believe.

The fact is: we were created for service. Both our bodies and our minds fall apart if we don't use them. Jesus said: You are salt. You are light. Paul said: you are called. James said: You are doers of the word. It's different language for the same truth: service is our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ.

But as our Bishops have pointed out, it's not just service. It's JOYFUL service. We find our fulfillment and our deepest purpose is service. A devoted follower of Jesus Christ finds joy in giving of themselves. But as we noted last week, sometimes, even when we don't feel love, joy, or charity towards another, we take a posture of goodwill towards them anyway. And deeper joy found, not in pleasure of the act, but in connection with God, can sustain us in difficult acts of service.

Again this week, this sermon is interactive. In just a second, I'm going to give you a question, and have you turn and discuss it with someone nearby, preferably somebody you don't know very well, if possible. Please make sure everyone is included – I don't want anyone left out. You've got three minutes to discuss the following two questions:

- 1) Describe a time you found true joy in serving someone else. What about that incident brought you joy?
- 2) Describe a time when you found joy in serving God, even if the service itself was not fun or enjoyable. What did you learn in that experience?

Okay, now let's hear some answers....

Some of you may think this lesson from Acts 12 is a strange one to choose for a lesson on service. What we immediately see here is the remarkable power of prayer, the beautiful power of community, and the miraculous deliverance of God against all odds. But I love Rhoda – she doesn't just take a passing interest in her mistress' faith. She trusts and follows and takes that faith as her own. Like the women who announce the resurrection, she runs to share good news with joy. The scene is almost laughable – leaving Peter pounding on the gate after all he's been through. But what's not laughable is her devotion, her joy, her conviction. None of us serve perfectly, but we can find joy in bringing good news and helping others who have been broken by the harsh and cruel world we live in. A little joy, a little good news, a little helping hand – it matters: it buoys our hope.

There was once a little boy who was listening very intently as his preacher spoke about letting Jesus live in our hearts. After worship, he asked him, "Preacher, I'm such a little boy and Jesus is so big—if Jesus lived in my heart, wouldn't he be sticking out some place?" [adapted from "Who Do You Put On?" by Billy D. Strayhorn, www.Sermons.com.] That little guy got right to the heart of things—no pun intended. For those of us who love Jesus, who worship Jesus, who seek to follow Jesus, service is how Jesus sticks out of us! We are beloved of God, created for service, called to hope, designed to better the world. We are God's gift to this time and place, which is no cause for arrogance. Gifts are made to be used. Gifts are given to remind the receiver of the love of the one who gave it. You and I are God's gift, meant to communicate the love and redeeming grace that we have felt in our own lives; meant to be used by God. Service is Christ-like, other-focused, hope-driven. We are called and created for service. As Christ was made known in breaking bread centuries ago, so now Christ is made known in the brokenness of the world, and in our willingness to love boldly and serve joyfully to address it. Thanks be to God! Amen.