

# May 2026

May 3, 2026

Text: Psalm 85:1-13

*“Justice and Peace Shall Embrace”*

Which had you rather have: peace or justice? How about living in a time of peace, but it is a time in which racism, sexism, and economic injustice thrive? How about living in a time of justice, but which justice was achieved by angry division, violent protest, or even war? The psalmist celebrates a God who wants peace and justice to come alive at the same time and place. “...righteousness and peace will kiss each other” (Psalm 85:10).

Most students of the Old Testament are convinced that this psalm was first sung when the people of Israel returned to their homeland after the hard time in exile. Although that setting was not perfect, it was the time of new beginnings.

This psalm is both a prayer and a proclamation. Verses 1-7 are addressed to God, and verses 8-13 declare what God can do. You have to admit that it takes a lot of confidence in the power of prayer to follow our plea to God with a celebration of God’s good answer to the prayer. The psalmist seems to be saying that even though God’s activity may be on a calendar different from ours, there is no doubt as to how God will act. Sometimes we may not even recognize how well and how quickly God has answered our prayer because God sees a better way to help us than we see ourselves.

The other day I watched a college basketball game won by my favorite team. (Yes, there are good Devils!) There was a star freshman player who was expected to score a mountain of points in every game. In this game, he barely scored at all, but he had multiple rebounds, double-digit assists, and a bunch of take-aways. In other words, he found an unexpected way to help the team win. Doesn’t God sometimes work like that? We can live with the confidence that God will get it done, even though it is not in the way we expect.

Indeed, who would have thought that peace and justice (peace and righteousness) could live at the same time? That’s the combination that God calls on us to live out. How do I work for peace? How do I work for justice? In the will of God, “steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other” (Psalm 85:10).

### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

In the Charles P. Frank novel *Digging for Tomorrow*, one of the characters offers this prayer: “Oh most gracious God, words are not adequate enough to thank You for the blessings You have bestowed upon us. Thank

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You for bringing Aaron out of a difficult place and returning him to us safely. Thank You for good friends who have tirelessly aided us. Protect us and guide us always to be the persons You want us to be. Amen.”

### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Use me for peace; use me for justice...”

May 10, 2026

Text: Psalm 89:1-4, 15-28, 38-41, 49

*“God’s Covenant with Us”*

Let me be honest with you. I have started this week’s lesson commentary several times, and none of it seems to flow helpfully. Should we reflect on God’s promise to David (Psalm 89:3)? If so, what do we do with the other side of the coin, God’s giving David the short end of the stick (Psalm 89:43)? Then, we know the story of David and Bathsheba, but God says the covenant with David is still good (Psalm 89:34). The psalmist seems to think God has abandoned God’s promises (Psalm 89:49).

Then, it dawns on me. The one constant in these rollercoaster verses is the presence of God. Even when the psalmist laments that he cannot experience God (Psalm 89:46), he admits that God is present, but just hidden from him. Even when I do not see God, God is still with me.

Do you remember when Jesus, on the cross, cried out “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani*,” which translates as “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). Even in that cry, there is an awareness that God the Father is present. Why else would Jesus speak out unless He acknowledged the presence of the One to whom He spoke?

Each of us has experienced times when God seemed absent, but what we thought was God’s absence was simply God’s presence in a

way we did not expect.

Notice the words that the psalmist uses to describe God's relationship with David and David's people. Steadfast love (v. 1). Faithfulness to all generations (v. 1). Established forever (v. 2). All generations (v. 4). Faithfulness surrounds (v. 8). My hand shall always remain with him (v. 21). My covenant with him will stand firm (v. 28). I will not remove from him my steadfast love (v. 33).

Then, notice the shift of gears at verse 38. Spurned and rejected him (v. 38). Full of wrath (v. 38). Renounced your covenant (v. 39). Defiled his crown (v. 40). Scorn of his neighbors (v. 41). Enemies rejoice (v. 42). Your servant is taunted (v. 50).

In both cases, God is present. The psalmist sets us an example of being fully honest before God.

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

Sandra Higgins Matthaëi (*The God We Worship*, Abingdon) has written: "God's assurance of blessing demands our response."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Let me be honest with You, Lord..."

May 17, 2026

Text: Acts 1:1-11

*"Called to be Witnesses"*

Now, for the rest of Spring, and on through the Summer, our study is going to take us through the Book of Acts. These chapters are Luke's way of showing the continuing presence of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Some people even call this book "The Acts of the Spirit."

Many years ago (as old as I am, lots of things happened "many years ago"), I went to a local church celebration of the anniversary of its founding. I figured they would acknowledge the folks who 150 years earlier had formed the congregation. No! They went back further than that. They celebrated those who gathered for the Ascension of Christ (Acts 1:6) as the real occasion for the founding of their church. Back to basics.

The Book of Acts, like the Gospel according to Luke, is addressed to Theophilus. That name means "friend of God" or "lover of God," so some students of the Bible think it is written for all believers, and not just one person with that name. As the church's journey unfolds in this account, it indeed becomes our story.

Jesus calls on us, and those early disciples, to be witnesses (Acts 1:8). That sounds like a delightful invitation until we recognize that the word translated "witness" is *martus*, the same word that gets translated "martyr." What is the price of our telling others what we know about Jesus?

The question raised in Acts 1:11 is a good one for us. "Why do you stand looking up toward

heaven?" That is our temptation: to make the journey with Jesus sort of an "out of this world" experience. On the contrary, Jesus calls on us to witness in this world, in our daily experience, in our human relationships, in this life as we know it.

On the church calendar, last Thursday (May 14), was Ascension Day. Some traditions do not observe Ascension Day (or today as Ascension Sunday). We are left to wonder: "Is that because the ascension of Jesus was when He turned to us to live out His ministry?"

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

In commenting on Acts 1:8, John Wesley wrote (*Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, Alec R. Allenson, Inc.): "'But ye shall receive power...and shall be witnesses to me,' that is, ye shall be empowered to witness My gospel, both by your preaching, and your suffering."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Lord, Jesus, You have looked at the likes of me, and still You have said that I am to be a witness, to pour out that grace that can use even me to be faithful..."

May 24, 2026

Text: Acts 2:1-13

*"The Holy Spirit Does Come Down"*

Do you remember what happened 288 years ago today? May 24, 1738. That was the day that John Wesley went to a Bible study and then wrote in his journal: "In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

He did not put it this way, but Wesley might have said: "The Holy Spirit is still alive and well!"

The Pentecost account in Acts 2:1-13 tells of that kind of experience for people of many, many different backgrounds (Look at Acts 2:9-11—Mercy! Where is my map when I need it!) The Holy Spirit came like a violent wind, like a blast of fire, and like a gentle touch. The Spirit found a way to reach each of them.

When I read that each heard what was being said in his or her own language (Acts 2:11), I am reminded that each of us has a different way of being reached by God's Word. For one, it might be great scholarship. For another, it might be an emotional kick. For someone else, it could be

family ties. For another, it might be relationships. For some, it could be exposure to miracles. For another, it is simply "out of the blue." There is no one way of being reached by the power of God's Word. No wonder the folks there were "amazed and perplexed" (Acts 2:12).

Have you ever had anyone doubt the truth of your religious experience? At Pentecost, some bystanders looked on and figured that these strange-behaving people were simply drunk (Acts 2:13). Today, someone may look at me and say, "I've seen how he behaves; I've seen how he ignores the needy; I've seen how he spends his money." Then, they might say, "He is simply filled with religious talk. There is no evidence of a changed life." The reality of Pentecost is measured by the changed life.

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

In *John Wesley's Teachings, Volume 2* (Zondervan), Thomas C. Oden writes: "Make no mistake. The filling of the faithful with the Spirit was not to manifest extraordinary gifts. It was simply for bestowing the mind of Christ upon all so as to elicit the ordinary fruits of the Spirit to all."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin this way: "Come, Holy Spirit. Bring the gifts You would offer to me that I might show forth Your mercy, Your grace, Your generosity, Your abiding presence..."

**May 31, 2026**

**Text: Acts 2:29-41**

#### *"The Spirit Convicts"*

In Peter's sermon, he is addressing "Israelites" (v. 29). He is speaking to many who have Jewish roots and traditions. He calls on them to "repent." In the Greek language, the word that is translated as "repent" (*metanoein*) basically means "to change one's mind." These Israelites might well have recalled the Hebrew word for "repent" (*teshuvah*). In that language, the word means "to go in a new direction." This all is the gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 38).

The title of this week's lesson ("The Spirit Convicts") reminds us that it is the Holy Spirit who calls us to change our mind, to change our direction. Peter invites those who repent to be baptized. Baptism is a sign of God's activity. Repentance comes when the Spirit moves us to that. Peter even says that the promise is even to children (v. 39), so the baptism of a child is a clear mark of God's activity, God's work.

If I repent more than once, why am I not baptized more than once? Baptism is the recognition of God's activity in pursuing us. That does not change, so we baptize once, a signal that God is always continuing the work of grace. Repentance is not a "one size fits all" matter; one repentance does not see me okay for the

rest of my life. God's grace is sufficient, symbolized by one baptism, but my journey calls me to repent again and again. It is God's grace, God's Spirit, that calls me into repentance, so I might find forgiveness and a new direction.

When I was in the third grade, my teacher (Mrs. Tally) wanted us to understand how it took a variety of jobs to get our community functioning. She asked each of us to tell the class what job our parents had. We heard "My dad owns a gas station." "Daddy is a farmer." "My mom works at the bank." "My parents run the furniture store." "My father is a pastor." "My mother works at home." Then, we waited for Paul Gyles to speak. We all knew that his father was the principal of the school. Finally, Paul Gyles spoke up. "My daddy's biggest job is being my daddy."

What is your biggest job? It may not be in the way the world measures value. God's Holy Spirit moves us into new attitudes, new relationships, new possibilities. In order to say "yes" to the newness to which God calls me, I repent of the ways I have crucified Jesus (v. 36) by failing to live the new life He would give me. The Spirit moves me to that repentance. The Spirit moves me to that new tomorrow.

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

Emil Brunner (*I Believe in the Living God*, Westminster) wrote: "To repent is really nothing else than to become honest before God and to see oneself as one is, in the mirror of God. Only when one becomes honest before God can one really receive God's word of grace."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Speak, Lord. I'm listening..."

## June 2026

**June 7, 2026**

**Text: Acts 4:1-22**

#### *"The Spirit Equips with Boldness"*

The preacher leaned forward in the pulpit. "I want you to hear this," he said. Then, slowly and with purpose, he went on: "We are not saved by good works. We are saved for good works."

That seems to be what Peter and John are saying to the uppity-ups who question them (Acts 4:1-22). Salvation is not in what we do, but in what Jesus Christ does (v. 12).

Of course, Peter and John had not been expecting to have to address these high and mighty "rulers of the people and elders" (v. 8). I got to wondering: when have we been in some unexpected place with an opportunity to witness in what we say or in what I do? When we vote in church council? When we see a homeless man on the street corner? When our grandchild asks

us why we keep going to church? When we step into the polling booth to vote? When the spouse of a friend suddenly dies?

Our study text says that it was the Holy Spirit that enabled Peter to speak so openly (v. 8). (In fact, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is a constant theme in the Book of Acts.) That same Holy Spirit is with us today. When would I have done something differently if I had had confidence that the Holy Spirit was with me?

Go back a few verses and read the first few verses of the third chapter of Acts. It tells the story that is the story-behind-the-story of this week's text. Peter is involved in the healing of a crippled beggar. He has done it in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:6). Had the man not been healed, Peter and John would not end up facing the anger of the authorities. But the beggar was healed and Peter had some explaining to do. He gave the credit to Jesus Christ (v. 10). When good emerges from my relationships, my activity, my priorities...when good emerges from what I do, the credit goes to Jesus Christ. Because the Lord is with me, good works are possible. That's not what saves me (v. 12), but it is an expression of the saving, healing power of Jesus. If we turn away from good works, we may be turning away from Jesus.

Note how this week's text ends: "...all of them praised God for what had happened" (v. 21). Again, we are reminded: the Holy Spirit equips us for the work of God.

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

In *Outward Sign and Inward Grace* (Beacon Hill Press), Rob Staples says: "This is a wholesome reminder that we cannot stereotype or structure or channel or corral the Holy Spirit."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Come, Holy Spirit, and bring Your equipping power..."

**June 14, 2026**

**Text: Acts 4:23-37**

***"Pray For and Give with Boldness"***

This lesson starts off with verses that celebrate how the early Christian believers were strong and bold in the way they testified to the Gospel (Acts 4:31). Hooray! We can all agree and be grateful for that witness.

But, then, boom! Their boldness takes on another dimension, and we are probably just a little less excited. This boldness is not in public speaking, but in what those disciples did with their money and their property (Acts 4:32-37). Suddenly, the text not only wants to hear how I speak the truth of the Gospel, but the "whole group of those who believed" (v. 32) wants to look at my checkbook! I don't mind showing you

my sermon notes, but I ain't quite ready to let you stroll through my checkbook and my credit card statement.

I remember a discussion we had one time in my Sunday School class. The question was "Should the pastor know how much each member of the church gives to the church?" Some argued that knowing who the "big givers" were would tempt the pastor to show favoritism to those "heavy hitters." Others protested and said a member's generosity or lack thereof was a spiritual issue, so the pastor needed to be informed so he or she could bring pastoral counseling as needed. What do you think? Why do you think that?

The word in Acts 4:31 that is translated in the *New Revised Standard Version* as "boldness" is *parrhēsia*. In the *Common English Bible*, it is rendered "with confidence." *The Emphasized New Testament* puts it as "with freedom of utterance." In *The Twentieth Century New Testament*, the word is "fearlessly." "Courageously" is the way it is put in *The New Testament: A Translation in the Language of the People*. Do these words describe the way I use my financial and property resources?

Again—as we have noted in our earlier look at the Book of Acts—it is the Holy Spirit who makes such boldness possible (v. 31). Luke, in writing these accounts, reminds us over and over again that if we have boldness in speaking, have boldness in giving, and boldness in healing and signs of Christ's presence, it is not because we are so wonderful, but because the Holy Spirit is so generous.

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

Bishop Kenneth Carder (*Living Our Beliefs, Discipleship Resources*) has written: "The God whom we follow into the future is present to guide, sustain, and shape us as individuals and as a church."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Shape me as You would have me be, O Lord..."

**June 21, 2026**

**Text: Acts 5:1-11**

***"The First Christian Charity Scam"***

I think I agree with Bishop William R. Cannon. He wrote a study of the Book of Acts (*The Book of Acts*, Upper Room Books), and in his thorough analysis of the Book of Acts, he omits any comments on Acts 5:1-11. Maybe he thought it went without saying. Maybe he was not sure what to say. This is a difficult text.

Ananias and Sapphira were in a Christian community that had agreed that all personal proceeds and profits would be given to the apostles for their ministry. After selling some land, the couple tucked away some of the proceeds for themselves and then told the apostles they were

bringing it all for the ministry. Peter told Ananias that the sin was not against the community but was against God (v. 4). Ananias fell over dead. Sapphira showed up and told the same lie: "Yeah, here are all the proceeds from the sale." Peter challenged her, and she fell over dead.

There is spiritual death, and there is physical death. I'll not linger on looking at these deaths. What we might explore is how we might lie to ourselves or lie to others about the fullness of our gifts to God's ministry. Integrity in our answer is serious business.

Last week, I told you about a discussion in my Sunday School class about whether or not the pastor ought to know what individuals give to the Church. Let's look at the other side of that question: Should the congregation know what the pastor gives to God's ministry? Why or why not?

The issue in our study text is not the first sin, keeping some of the money for themselves; in this text, the issue is telling a lie to God and the community about what they had done. I am left to wonder: When have I lied to God about how I am using my time and my financial resources? Was God fooled by my untruth? (All who think God is fooled when I tell a lie, raise a hand. Hmmm. From here, I don't see any hands raised.)

In our text, "great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things" (Acts 5:11). Don't you think there was such great fear because everyone recognized that they, too, had tried to lie to God? I look around; I see more hands raised this time.

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

Ken and Pat Birt wrote a book about her struggle with cancer (*A Journey of Love and Miracles*, iUniverse): "Listen to your inner-self. Sometimes a change of plans might be exactly what God directs...(God) does communicate with you and directs you in the correct path."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "For starters, forgive me, Lord..."

**June 28, 2026**

**Text: Acts 5:17-42**

### *"Obeying God Rather than Human Authority"*

In preparation for this week's commentary, I looked up Acts 5:29 in a variety of translations. There was one place I checked and found that throughout the telling of the story of the apostles, their teaching, their imprisonment, their mysterious freedom from prison, their re-arrest, the crowd's response, and their final release, there were numerous footnotes, exploring Greek words, offering helpful interpretations, suggesting implications for our lives, etc. I looked

for the footnotes on Acts 5:29. There were none, not one. It was as if the editors of that edition of the Bible felt there was nothing else

"We must obey God rather than any human authority" (NRSV, Acts 5:29).

There have been times when Christians have had moral disagreements with their government. There were many faithful in Germany who obeyed God's voice rather than that of Adolf Hitler. There have been times when an employee chose to ignore an unjust practice advocated by her or his boss.

But for most of us, the most present "human authority" is our collection of friends. When all those around me argue for a common point of view, what do I do if I feel that God's will points in another direction? I shall probably stay quiet. Alas.

The apostles were told to shut up, but they felt that God wanted them to speak. They did not say, "We want to speak, so we are going to speak no matter what you say." They explained their action not by saying it was what they wanted to do, but by saying it was what God wanted them to do.

When I look at our Lord's willingness to die rather than violate divine purpose, I wonder if I am willing to suffer even as little as being embarrassed in order to do what I think God wants done.

If obeying God is so important, what am I doing to learn the will of God? Prayer? Bible study? Christian conversation? Inner reflection? Looking at Jesus?

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

In *On Being a Christian* (Doubleday), Hans Küng has written: "...God wills nothing but (our) advantage, (our) true greatness, and (our) ultimate dignity. This then is God's will: (humankind's) well-being."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Dear God, in the Scripture, You have shown us how those early apostles sought to do Your will. Now, be with us as we seek to find Your will and work to live out Your will..."

# July 2026

**July 5, 2026**

**Text: Acts 5:12-16**

### *"Peter, Reborn in the Spirit"*

When I looked at this week's focal text, I read it over and over. Nothing jumped out at me. My blank computer screen waited for me to

typesomething. It happened that my young adult grandson was visiting. I asked him to review the passage (Acts 5:12-16). He said, "It grows out of the story told in Acts 3:1-10." So, I had to ask what those verses might teach us. These reflections grow out of what he said. (Thank you, Liam!)

The crowd that followed the apostles had seen what had happened when Peter and John had headed up to the temple (Acts 3:1). There, they had seen a man who was looked down upon by everybody. He was a beggar and nobody liked having him pester them for money. Not only that, but he had been lame from birth (v. 2) and folks actually had to carry him in to find a spot where he could beg. No one had any respect for him. Then came Peter.

Peter respected the beggar. That man was worth his attention. Others thought the man was just a bum, but Peter saw him as one of God's creatures. Peter reached for him and offered a gift of healing. The man stood up and began jumping around. No wonder a crowd began following the apostles! They signaled that God cares for all.

Do I live with all I encounter in a way that signals that God is love? How do I relate to those whom society looks down on? When I look around on Sunday morning, do I see people in our congregation that don't look like most of us?

One day, I heard someone comment that we have a lot of homeless people who seem to linger around our church. I thought my friend was complaining. That showed my shallow thinking. He was pleased that we had so many homeless people at our free breakfasts, using our parking lot free pantry, occasionally sleeping in our stew hut shelter, and even showing up on Sunday morning. When we are in the apostolic tradition (like these accounts in Acts), there is an openness to difference, a support of the needy, and a willingness to engage. The apostles seem to ask themselves, "What is best for this person?" Dare I ask the same question?

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

Emil Brunner (*I Believe in the Living God*, Westminster) wrote: "Missionary zeal was always a thermometer for the warmth of the Christian faith. When missionary zeal becomes lame, then faith has also become lame and cooled down."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Send me, O Lord, as You need to..."

July 12, 2026

Text: Acts 8:14-25

#### *"Jesus' Disciples Versus a Magician"*

Usually, when I reflect on this text, I look at how the magician Simon tried to cheat and discover some new secret powers. That disgrace leads him to pray for forgiveness and a new beginning

(v. 24). That message is still in these verses, but this time something else jumped out at me.

Look at Acts 8:14-17. It tells about people who had been saved by their faith in Jesus Christ and their acceptance of the word of God. Wouldn't you think that would be enough? Wouldn't you be pleased if a bunch of folks committed themselves to Jesus Christ? One of the inspiring images of evangelical revival meetings is a scene with men and women at the altar, accepting an invitation to follow Jesus.

But that may be quitting too early.

These verses tell of how the journey is to continue: receive and live by the Holy Spirit. There have been times in the history of the Church when we measured success solely by counting on the number of professions of faith. This text lets us know that that ain't enough. Do we let the Holy Spirit continue to shape us, to use us, to guide us? What is the evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in my life? Think about your local church: what is the evidence that the Holy Spirit is guiding congregational values and activities?

This is certainly not to say that faith in Jesus Christ is not important. Nothing in this text suggests that. It is to say that there is more to the story.

In this week's account, when Peter and John laid their hands on those who had faith, all became aware of the Holy Spirit (v. 17). When do you see the Holy Spirit at work? Last week, I saw a member of Bethany come every day of the week to restock the Little Free Pantry (in the parking lot). Last week, I heard a new member say she came to Bethany because she felt a welcome she did not feel at a previous church. Last week, a player on our dartball team offered a supportive prayer for the hurting places in our opponent's congregation. The Holy Spirit is alive and well.

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

Bill Leonard has written (*Baptist Questions, Baptist Answers*, Westminster John Knox): "The Holy Spirit is at work in the world; it is the stealth presence of God moving in places and persons that often the world (and the church) do not recognize immediately, if ever."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Come, Holy Spirit, and bring alive my faith in Jesus..."

July 19, 2026

Text: Acts 10:1-48

#### *"Peter and Cornelius: Crossing Borders"*

These verses capture one of the life-changing moments in the life of the early church. We see unfold an awareness of God's love of all people, not just "my kind of folks." But this does not come easily. Looking over this text, I see the

word "hungry" (v. 10), the word "puzzled" (v. 17), the word "mortal" (v. 26), the word "dazzling" (v. 30), the word "oppressed" (v. 38), the word "commanded" (v. 42), the word "astounded" (v. 45). This shocking new clarity about God's universal love does not come easily.

In this account, there is a description of Cornelius that got me to wondering. In v. 2 and v. 22, Cornelius is described as one who feared God. The word translated "feared" is *phōbēō*. It can mean to be scared or frightened of something or someone. It can mean to be in respect or awe of something or someone. It can mean to be alarmed by something or someone; it can mean to hold something or someone in reverence. Which do you think best describes Cornelius? In v. 4, he is in terror before God's angel. In v. 2, he is in an ongoing conversation with God. I guess we can say that God is not limited to just one way of loving us.

This chapter gives the inspiring account of "God showing no partiality" (v. 34). Are there those I look down upon, but whom God loves? What human distinctions are important to me, but which mean naught to God? Race? Gender? Income? Strength? Popularity?

Peter comments on how some have been witnesses to what God has done in Jesus Christ (v. 39, v. 41). A few weeks ago, in this series of commentaries, we noted that the word "witness" is a translation of *martus*, a word sometimes rendered as "martyr." That reminds me that there is a risk in telling others what we have seen in Jesus Christ. There have been times and places in history when Christians were persecuted and even killed simply for being Christian. In the time and place where I live, Christian martyrdom is more likely to mean being considered irrelevant, or bothersome, or ignorant. Saints have often been willing to die because of their faith. What am I willing to undergo because of my faith?

How firm is my foundation?

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

In *Bad Faith* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), Randall Balmer has reminded us: "A building can feature all sorts of dazzling baubles and filigree, but if the timbers that make up its foundation are rotten, the entire structure is compromised."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Lord Jesus, You have been so real for Peter and Cornelius, so now I look at Your presence in my life. Be with me so my witness is full and faithful..."

July 26, 2026

Text: Acts 12:1-23

### *"An Escape Too Good to Be True?"*

Have you ever made a public confession of faith that Jesus Christ is your Savior? If so, you are an angel. Have you ever contributed to a fund to help feed underprivileged people? If so, you are an angel. Have you ever reached across racial lines to develop a new friendship? If so, you are an angel.

The word "angel" is a translation of *aggēlōs*, a Greek word that means "messenger." If you have by word or deed expressed the saving, healing, loving truth of Jesus Christ, you have been a messenger of that truth. You have been an angel.

Sometimes, others do not accept the work of angels. In today's study text, there is a dramatic telling of how Peter was rescued from prison. Then he showed up at the home of some friends (v. 13), and some of the folks didn't think it could possibly be true (v. 15). Peter had to keep on knocking (v. 16). When have I given up on a mission because I did not get immediate results?

There is a sad side to Peter's escape from prison. Herod is so upset that his prisoner got away that he orders the guards at the prison be put to death (Acts 12:19). Clearly, not everyone is pleased with the message and work of an angel. Have there been times that I have ignored what God's messenger had to say?

This strange story ends with the death of Herod (v. 23). Eaten by worms! What an infamous death! In putting it this way, Luke (the author of Acts) is making it clear that wealth and power are not the measurements of faithfulness. So, I am moved to wonder how I have measured my faithfulness to God.

Because we know the story has a happy ending, we can laugh at the way the maid (Rhoda) reacted to the sudden awareness that Peter was out of prison (vv. 13-14). Instead of opening the gate to let him in, she rushes to tell the others the good news. This makes me remember times when I have failed to do the most obvious, simple thing that would have helped. Maybe as simple as a smile at a lonely person...maybe as simple as saying "Hope to see you at church next week" ...maybe as simple as holding the door for someone to enter the store. Sometimes, the best way to serve God is a simple first step.

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

In *Wesley, Aquinas, and Christian Perfection* (Baylor), Edgardo Colón-Emeric wrote: "Because angelic understanding is unerringly true, (angelic) actions are unceasingly oriented toward fulfilling the will of God."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Use me, O Lord, even me..."



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