

Dear brothers and sisters,

I want to take you on a journey of thoughts and through time. During which I'd like us to listen to two people...

What should we do? We're in prison. Our situation is hopeless. No one speaks up for us. We've been abandoned by the world... We're imprisoned and isolated. For now, there are two of us. But who knows for how long? What will they do to us here, in prison. They've shackled our feet. They've beaten and mistreated us. Our cell is remote, far away from the others. We can tell that they're guarding us well, feel their presence, their lingering outside the cell. We're afraid.

Where exactly are we? In a prison in Russia? Are we in Sudan? In Iran? Are we in the present or in the past? Is it during a war? Are prisoners describing their distress as people who are persecuted or as prisoners of war? Whose questions and complaints are we hearing?

What should we do? We can't free ourselves. Our pleas and questions go unanswered. We are cut off from the world and surrounded by walls on every side.

Then suddenly we remember...

Psalm 126, a song of ascents:

"When the Lord restores the captives of Zion, we will be like those who dreamed. Our mouths filled with laughter, and our tongues with songs of joy."

It's good that this psalm, this song, came to mind. Hope begins to grow in us. Others have experienced captivity before us. God was with them. He was their only hope. They sang him a song of praise and were thankful that they were strengthened through him.

We sit here in prison. We reflect, we speak with each other. Why not sing right now? Here, in this moment, in this situation? Yes, not just after we're free. Even behind walls, even in chains. After all, our God is a God who is everywhere. For Him, there are no walls, no limits. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, not even death remains an absolute. He is everywhere. And all around us. We sing now. In trust, in hope, in faith.

Sermon Text Reading: Acts 16:23–28

And then the songs begin. Paul and Silas, as told in the book of Acts, praise God with their songs. They sing, echoing the spirit of Psalm 96: "Sing to the Lord and praise His name; proclaim His salvation day after day." They sing as if they were already free...

And then, long ago, it happens. The miracle, the earthquake, then the doors swinging open. The foundations of the prison shake, their chains break. And how the story continues, we all know from the story of the apostles. We know of the guards' despair, their fear, their awe at what had happened.

What happened there? What power, what significance does the singing of the prisoners, those who were afraid, hold?

The singing brought freedom. While the story speaks of collapsing walls, it probably applies in a symbolic sense too. Singing sets us free. It's a release, a way to pour out and express our feelings. It gives form to thoughts and emotions through melody and words. Emotions and our internal attitudes change. It stirs movement. Hope begins to sprout. And the people of the Bible often made use of this. The many psalms are examples of how people processed the most diverse situations, pleading to or praising God. How they complained and gave thanks.

Singing brought comfort. Do you know that feeling? When you're uneasy, alone in the dark. A comforting melody, a few notes that chase away the emptiness and the darkness? A lullaby for children or calming melodies?

Do you know what it's like to sing when heartbroken, to listen to music? Maybe even scream out the pain?

Singing forms bonds. Singing a song together creates unity. It shows a shared attitude, a shared idea, a shared faith. It's beautiful. It heals. People who sing in choirs do something good not just for others but also for themselves.

"He who sings, prays twice." Saint Augustine is often quoted this way. We could simply speak... but instead we sing. Our life has a rhythm. In every person's chest beats a heart that sings a song. Every step we take has a rhythm, our breath is movement. Singing, alongside speaking, is the vital expression of this movement within us, sparked by the movement inside.

What does singing mean to those in uniform, soldiers who are followers of Christ?

I believe: It's good to keep a treasure trove of songs, we know by heart, within us. When we're alone, without a song book, imprisoned or in darkness, when we need to support each other in situations where we can't reach for the lyrics...

This is also my personal passion to encourage learning songs by heart. To carry words, melodies, prayers in your heart. Your treasure when you are isolated and afraid.

I believe: It's good to be able to express our emotions through melodies. When words fail, maybe just a hum without words. The smallest and softest form of sung prayer. Maybe a comfort to a comrade. And where humming is possible, speaking and praying may follow.

I believe: It's good when we sing together. That connects us, even if we don't all speak the same language. It's something that we're also experiencing here at this gathering. We already share the Christian language. We know the power of Kyrie, Hallelujah, Amen. Wish, praise, and devotion. Even when the full lyrics are foreign to us, those words make a song feel like home. Because these terms are the same in all our languages. They are the language of our faith.

What significance will singing have for us in the future? We may be asking ourselves this now, especially this year, in light of the situation in Europe. And we pass this on to our African siblings as well: Will singing comfort and help us when we face difficult, threatening situations? Will we experience war? Will we face violence and have to defend ourselves? What could it mean if we then have songs? Songs that connect us, but also songs that connect us with God.

And with this thought, we return to Paul and Silas in prison. They sing. They are united, yearning for freedom, full of hope in the power of their God. They're brave since the songs they sing can also be heard by the guards.

Thus, singing is always a confession of our faith. A visible sign of what our hope is. And whoever makes something visible, makes themselves vulnerable. But things turn out quite differently. The prison walls collapse. What an amazing image of freedom that can happen through faith.

Dear brothers and sisters, I cannot tell you if or how you will experience freedom in your life. I don't know whether your singing will melt a heart of ice. I don't know these things. But I wish for us to remember that God is everywhere, that there is no place forsaken by God, and that He hears our songs, both the lonely songs and the ones we share with others. He gave us voices so that we may let them be heard. We are wonderfully made by Him, and within us live rhythm and melody.

Amen