

The Free Church
Hampstead Garden Suburb
Lent Prayer Diary 2018

'...Remember those who are in Prison, as though in Prison with Them...' (Hebrews 13, 3a)

"Prison is designed to break one's spirit and destroy one's resolve. To do this, the authorities attempt to exploit every weakness, demolish every initiative, negate all signs of individuality - all with the idea of stamping out that spark that makes each of us human and each of us who we are." (Nelson Mandela, 'Long Walk to Freedom')

"The lowest depth that a human being can reach is to perform or to receive torture. The goal of the torturer is to inflict horrific pain and dehumanize another being. The act not only destroys both parties' souls — the victim's and the perpetrator's — but also the very fabric of a society. By subjecting men or women to enforced violence, sexual violation, or worse, you transform them into something subhuman. How does someone return to the human race after having been so brutalized?" (Janine Di Giovanni, 'The Morning They Came for Us: Dispatches from Syria')

'If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed'

Sunday February 18th - Saturday February 24th

Please read Acts chapter 4, verses 1 - 20

"Prison is designed to separate, isolate, and alienate you from everyone and everything. You're not allowed to do so much as touch your spouse, your parents, your children. The system does everything within its power to sever any physical or emotional links you have to anyone in the outside world. They want your children to grow up without ever knowing you. They want your spouse to forget your face and start a new life. They want you to sit alone, grieving, in a concrete box, unable even to say your last farewell at a parent's funeral." (Damien Echols, 'Life After Death')

Please pray for...

1. Prison Chaplains, visiting clergy, faith community reps...
2. Lay Visitors, Volunteer helpers of every kind...
3. Those who teach, and those who train the prisoners...
4. Those who offer therapy, counselling, psychological support...

"If Jesus said we're free, we ought to accept his declaration at face value and run with it. It ought to help us define ourselves. But it doesn't. Christians will do almost anything to get away from the simple meaning of the word and the wonderful experience of freedom." (Steve Brown, A Scandalous Freedom)

Sunday February 25th - Saturday March 3rd

Please read Acts chapter 5, verses 11 - 42

"We could choose to be a nation that extends care, compassion, and concern to those who are locked up and locked out or headed for prison before they are old enough to vote. We could seek for them the same opportunities we seek for our own children; we could treat them like one of "us." We could do that. Or we can choose to be a nation that shames and blames its most vulnerable, affixes badges of dishonour upon them at young ages, and then relegates them to a permanent second-class status for life. That is the path we have chosen, and it leads to a familiar place." (Michelle Alexander, 'The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colour Blindness')

Please pray for...

1. Prisoners on 'Death Row', awaiting execution, whenever...
2. Those prisoners on whole life sentences; who will die in prison...
3. Prisoners serving 'indeterminate sentences' - no release date...
4. Those prisoners serving their time in 'solitary confinement'...

"You ought to live your life with such freedom and joy that uptight Christians will doubt your salvation." (Steve Brown, A Scandalous Freedom)

Sunday March 4th - Saturday March 10th

Please read Acts chapter 12, verses 1 - 19

"I am convinced that imprisonment is a way of pretending to solve the problem of crime. It does nothing for the victims of crime, but perpetuates the idea of retribution, thus maintaining the endless cycle of violence in our culture. It is a cruel and useless substitute for the elimination of those conditions - poverty, unemployment, homelessness, desperation, racism, greed - which are at the root of most punished crime. The crimes of the rich and powerful go mostly unpunished...It must surely be a tribute to the resilience of the human spirit that even a small number of those men and women in the hell of the prison system survive it and hold on to their humanity." (Howard Zinn, 'You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train: A Personal History of Our Times')

Please pray for...

1. All those detained in Immigration Removal Centres...
2. Those locked up in Youth Custody Centres...
3. Patients confined to Long Term Secure Psychiatric Units...
4. All those remanded in custody - awaiting their trial...

"The only people who get better are people who know that, if they never get better, God will love them anyway." (Steve Brown, A Scandalous Freedom)

Sunday March 11th - Saturday March 17th

Please read Acts chapter 16, verses 11 - 40

"Expensive illogicalities and inefficiencies do not worry the monsters of American bureaucracy, and the taxpayers are enthusiastic and eager to spend fortunes in the name of fighting crime. Prison places cost the US taxpayer more than university places. The American belief that prisons are the best way to combat crime has led to an incarceration rate that is at least five times that of almost any industrialised nation. Overcrowding is endemic. Conditions are appalling, varying from windowless, sensory-deprived isolation to barren futile brutality." (Howard Marks, 'Mr. Nice')

Please pray for...

1. Prison Governors - Those with ultimate authority...
2. Prison officers - Those who are 'on the front line'...
3. All support staff - The cooks, the cleaners, everyone else...
4. Those who influence prisons policy, & those who enact it...

"Whenever a new Christian comes into the church, I wince a bit, because I'm afraid that they will get the "religion disease," that the "church virus" will kill off the joy and freedom Jesus purchased on the cross to give them." (Steve Brown, A Scandalous Freedom)

Sunday March 18th - Saturday March 24th

Please read Acts chapter 21, verses 27 - 36

"In order for prisons to truly serve the public, the people who run them would do well to aspire to the words of Thomas Mott Osborne, the storied warden of New York's Sing Sing Prison in the early part of the twentieth century, who vowed, 'We will turn this prison from a scrap heap into a repair shop.'" (Piper Kerman)

Please pray for...

1. All newly released prisoners...
2. Probation officers, & all after release care providers...
3. Those in prison for the first time...
4. Women prisoners: particularly those with babies to nurse...

"Jesus invited us to a dance ... and we've turned it into a march of soldiers, always checking to see if we're doing it right and are in step and in line with the other soldiers. We know a dance would be more fun, but we believe we must go through hell to get to heaven, so we keep marching." (Steve Brown, A Scandalous Freedom)

Sunday March 25th - Saturday March 31st

Please read Acts chapter 27, verses 1 - 44

"It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones." (Nelson Mandela)

Please pray for...

1. All Political Prisoners...
2. All Prisoners of Conscience - political, religious, moral...
3. All Prisoners subjected to torture...
4. All so-called 'Prisoners of War'...

"Whenever a Christian follows authority figures who don't allow questions about themselves or their direction or teaching, get out and don't look back. Whenever someone says he knows what's best for your life, better than you do; whenever someone says that she speaks for God; whenever someone pretends to be anything other than a flawed human being who makes mistakes and sometimes gets it wrong — that person is sitting on a pedestal of his or her own making, and if you don't destroy it, God will. So many freedom-destroying things we do are connected to an irresponsible decision to allow others to be to us what only God is supposed to be." (Steve Brown, A Scandalous Freedom).

April 1st 2018

Easter Day

'(April) Fools for Christ'

Please read 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 18 -31

*"If in that Syrian garden, ages slain,
You sleep, and know not you are dead in vain,
Nor even in dreams behold how dark and bright
Ascends in smoke and fire by day and night
The hate you died to quench and could but fan,
Sleep well and see no morning, son of man.*

*But if, the grave rent and the stone rolled by,
At the right hand of majesty on high
You sit, and sitting so remember yet
Your tears, your agony and bloody sweat,
Your cross and passion and the life you gave,
Bow hither out of heaven and see and save."*

A.E. Houseman

'He is not here, He is risen'...He is risen indeed'

