



God are you here with me?

God, the old year of 2009 is coming to an end. As I sit here I should be thinking of change. But, rather I am thinking of old friends, past loves, false starts and missed opportunities. Nothing in my life ever stays the same. Behind these walls inmates are moved in and inmates are moved out of this place. There are times that I feel so alone. I feel uprooted and far away from the life, family and friends I have known before. They say that life is a journey, but this place is all boundaries and rules and regulations. My feet walk the same path everyday and every step closely watched by the eyes of the officers and by the others locked away here.

God, another year is now coming to a close and as I sit here behind walls of concrete and doors of iron bars I think only of death and today, God, sitting in this pressure cooker, I feel so alone. It's hard at times to even find You here. People behind these walls are dying. Some are dying physically of AIDS, of stab wounds and beatings, of suicide. God, some are waiting to die. Many have died or are dying emotionally because they have given up. Some are dying mentally because everyday is the same and we have forgotten any hope we could have for a productive future and lifestyle. I don't want to give up. I don't want my family and loved ones to give up on me either. "Help me not to give up, O' God. Like the old hymn says, *"When other helpers fail and comforts flee, O' thou who changes not, abide in me."* Abide in me here, O' God, where I'm facing the beginning of another year behind walls of concrete and doors of iron bars. ...Amen (an inmate's prayer)

Read Psalm 120 (A cry of distress)

For too long have I been dwelling among those who hate peace.

The Word of God (Bible) message is not about a remote and distant God....But it is rather a message about an active and vigorous God who is found in the midst of all those "earthy" things of which the Bible is so full.....God's message is never: Turn away from the sinful world and find me somewhere else. The Word of God is always: Immerse yourselves in this sinful world that so desperately needs words and acts of healing, and you will find you are not alone, for I am already there, summoning you to help me. The Word of God is a very earthy book because God is a very earthy God. God is looking for those who will go into the darkest of places and teach and show His love and His delivering power. *Even in those darkest of places He is in our midst.*

In the Jail and Prison Ministry we meet many who feel they would never be welcomed at every table. They realize that most people would never invite them to share a meal at their home or some fine and fancy restaurant. Some would rather see them "punished" than eat with them. Others are afraid of them, afraid of getting involved in their life of crisis and confusion. Many an inmate would tell you, "They wouldn't or couldn't blame them." But, Jesus always welcomed the sinner to the table whether they felt worthy or not. Jesus broke the bread for all of us. Jesus understands the inmate's broken spirit. He understands the inmate's broken life. He poured the wine from the cup of the new covenant for all of us and He still pours out His life, His love for this sad and dying world. Today, as the HIM Ministry enters into those walls of concrete and door of iron bars all He asks of us is to put aside our differences and come to His table together, as brothers and sisters, children of God. We must carry the message to the inmate that God cares as much for the weak and the disadvantaged as He does for the strong and fortunate. As a Ministry we ask God to teach us His will that we may become advocates for His way and an instrument of His peace.

Ask any inmate and he will tell you pretty much the same thing and that is: They know what Hell is like. Hell is feeling separated from everything familiar. Hell is having a number instead of a name. Hell is having to always watch their back. Hell is not being believed when they are actually telling the truth. Hell is disappointing someone they love. Hell is having to obey orders that really don't seem to make sense. Hell is feeling like their life is being wasted and nobody cares. They know what Hell is like, but God and those going in to minister to these children of God see past their jail / prison clothes, their inmate number because we call them by name just as He does us.

Heaven is being a child of God and centered in God's will, being a channel of His divine grace. Hell, on the other hand, is the experience of being separated from God. It is the fruit of being out of sync with nature and out of step with God's will.

Our Mission for God in both the Jails and Prisons is to tell the inmate that "NO" Sin is so great that it can separate them from His love. Even after Moses resorted to murder, God called him to use his life for good. Even after Cain murdered Abel, God promised to protect him. Even after Saul hunted and tortured Christians, God called forth his gift of new sight.

The Word of God reveals that even the inmate can change and that He will never stop calling us to new life. God is asking that we as a Ministry both teach and show how God can use their bitterness and despair to create new life. Can we ever doubt the power of His mighty hand? In the depths of the earth, He presses coal into diamonds. In the soft belly of the oyster, He can change a grain of sand into a pearl. In the darkness of the cocoon, He can turn a caterpillar into a butterfly. As the snake shakes off its old skin, so both we and the inmate can shake off this life to find something new and something beautiful in God.

Just as God has been a God of patience with us we too must be one in the same with the inmate. We must help them to understand that as the winter landscape hides the springtime flowers just beneath the soil and the winter trees hide the promise of new leaves, so it is with our new birth. We must both teach and nurture them to trust in His divine plan. To be patient with the mysteries they still cannot understand. We must teach them to be still and to know that He is God.

Has the formation of drops of rain, snow flakes and of hailstones always been a puzzle to you? I am still in awe of His marvelous works. The miracle of my hands, my heartbeat, my breath. I thank Him for loving all that He has created and I pray that the Holy Spirit would breathe into the lives of those we minister to "New Life" even while they are imprisoned. Help them to remember that He alone loves all that He created.

All this in His precious name I pray.....Pam

