Devotional Reflection, Tuesday, September 1, 2026
Proper 17, the week of the fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

The Ultimate Act of Witness

Key phrases for reflection from today's Epistle reading:
12:1About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. 2He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. 3After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

You will find the full text of today's Acts reading at the end of this reflection.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings (*BCP*, 983)
AM Psalm 26, 28; PM Psalm 36, 39
Job 12:1,13:3-17,21-27; Acts 12:1-17; John 8:33-47

Today we celebrate the Feast of David P. Oakerhater. (See below.)
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David's Reflections

Dietrich Bonhöffer, a young, courageous German theologian, was executed by the Nazis in April of 1945 within the range of the sound of the artillery of the advancing American troops. His letters and poems written during a long imprisonment were published after the war. (The late Dr. Reginald Fuller, a priest and New Testament scholar who lived and ministered in Richmond, VA after retirement until his death in 2007, participated in translating that work into English.) One of Bonhöffer's poems, "Stations on the Road to Freedom," ends with this strophe:

Death
Come now, thou greatest of feasts on the journey to freedom eternal;
death, cast aside all the burdensome chains, and demolish
the walls of our temporal body, the walls of our souls that are blinded,
so that at last we may see that which here remains hidden.
Freedom, how long we have sought thee in discipline, action, and suffering;
dying, we now may behold thee revealed in the Lord. *

We normally do not think of death as freedom; yet, death actually does free us into a larger spiritual existence, previously unseen and experienced only in part through the Spirit in our temporal existence. Today's epistle reading offers an account of the second martyrdom, that of one of the Twelve, James the brother of John and one of Jesus' confidants among the Twelve.

The word martyr derives from the Greek word for witness, *martus*. One can offer no greater witness to their commitment than to die for their faith. What a witness that kind of innocent suffering provides to those outside, and what a source of encouragement to the rest of us to have courage and to stand fast in our faith. Dying for your faith offers those taking your life and those looking on the ultimate act of witness.

The martyr lets go of his or her life, releasing himself or herself into the hands of God. Jesus said that those who would save their lives will lose them in the attempt and that those who lose their lives ultimately will save them. To risk embarrassment or rejection for speaking of our faith to others constitutes a much milder form of letting go. But, a letting go it is. We let ourselves go into the hands of God and proclaim our independence of the approval and acceptance of others.

I still find myself grinning at the humorous way Terry Eagleton put this in his Terry lectures at Yale. ". . . the New Testament is a brutal destroyer of human illusions. If you follow Jesus and don't end up dead, it appears you have some explaining to do." +

To take up one's cross is to live with that kind of freedom, to be willing to be in the same place as Jesus when he was rejected and crucified--to share his rejection. As Jesus said in yesterday's Gospel, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." And, as Bonhöffer said, "Freedom, how long we have sought thee in discipline, action, and suffering; dying, we now may behold thee revealed in the Lord." *

+ Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2010), p. 27. If you are not familiar with the Terry lectureship, you can view Eagleton's lectures (given in 2008) and learn more about others at this link: https://terrylecture.yale.edu/previous-lectureships

* Dietrich Bonhöffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged edition, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Reginald Fuller, Frank Clark, John Bowden. (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 370-71.

Collect of the Day, Proper 17, the fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*. (BCP, 233)

Today we celebrate the Feast of David P. Oakerhater, deacon and missionary (died 31 Aug 1931 CE).
http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/DPOakerhater.htm
https://www.episok.org/saint-oakerhater

Collect of the Feast of David P. Oakerhater
O God of unsearchable wisdom and mercy; Liberate us from bondage to self, and empower us to serve you and our neighbors, that like your servant David Oakerhater, we might bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; through Jesus Christ, the captain of our salvation; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A Collect for Peace
Most holy God, the source of all good desires, all right judgments, and all just works: Give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, so that our minds may be fixed on the doing of your will, and that we, being delivered from the fear of all enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through the mercies of Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen. (BCP, 123)

Of the Departed
Eternal Lord God, you hold all souls in life: Give to your whole Church in paradise and on earth your light and your peace; and grant that we, following the good examples of those who have served you here and are now at rest, may at the last enter with them into your unending joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (BCP, 253)

A Collect for the Presence of Christ
Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. *Amen*. (BCP, 124)

A Collect for Mission
Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers which we offer before you for all members of your holy Church, that in their vocation and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.* (BCP, 100)

Daily Office Epistle, Acts 12:1-17
12:1About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. 2He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. 3After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) 4When 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. 6The 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. 7Suddenly 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. 8The 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.' 9Peter 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. 10After 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. 11Then 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.' 12As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying. 13When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. 14On 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. 15They said to her, `You are out of your mind!' But she insisted that it was so. They said, `It is his angel.' 16Meanwhile Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the gate, they saw him and were amazed. 17He motioned to them with his hand to be silent, and described for them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he added, `Tell this to James and to the believers.' Then he left and went to another place.

Daily Offices in the Book of Common Prayer

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *The Book of Common Prayer*
Noonday Prayer, page 103, *Book of Common Prayer*
Order of Worship for Evening (Vespers), p 109, *Book of Common Prayer*
Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*
Compline (Night Prayer), page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*
Daily Devotionals, page 136, *Book of Common Prayer*