

Sermon - 10/09/22
Ps 66; Jer 29:1, 4-7;
2 Tim 2:8-15; Lu 17:11-19
The Word of God Is Not Chained

You and I don't suffer persecution for our faith. We rarely see or meet radical Islamists such as Boko Haram. We learn about the peoples whose lives are plagued with persecution in news reports.

Let me tell you Aisha Granger's story. It is not so shocking as some. She is a Fula or Fulani African from Nigeria. The Fulani people are 90% Muslim. Aisha grew to be a teenager and intended to be a good Muslim wife and mother. She also had a real thirst for learning. She wanted to attend school. She married at age 18 and had her first child within a year. She was able to go to the College of Islamic Studies in Bauchi State, Nigeria. She became a state representative for the Federation of Muslim Women. Her living room became a place of prayer for women, since they may not worship in the main sanctuary of the mosque.

Aisha accepted the Muslim notion that Christians are infidels. She had no Christian friends, she did not listen to Christian teaching, because they don't worship Allah. But there is an increasing phenomenon in our time. God is speaking directly, one to one with Muslims.

In her twenties, Aisha began having severe migraine headaches. She went to many traditional healers. Nothing helped. The imam told her to recite a verse from the Koran four times – then to slaughter four rams. If that did not work, said her Muslim healer, then she would die. The sacrifice didn't work, so Aisha concluded she was about to die. She decided to say one last prayer. She went into the bathroom to perform her ritual washing. Before she could complete the ritual, she dropped to the floor. She sensed a voice saying, "I want you to worship Me." She knew enough about the Christian faith to realize this still small voice had to be the God of the Bible. The God who interacts on a personal level.

After this supernatural encounter, Aisha began a four-year search. She gradually left her Islamic leadership positions. She spent a lot of time in her living room seeking God. She knew how much she stood to lose if she chose the infidels' God over the religion of her people. Yet, she saw that Jesus Christ offers something different and wonderful. Aisha says, "I had never heard of salvation before in Islam. There's nothing like that. Your salvation is only by your good deeds. Even then, Allah will decide whether you go to paradise or not. There is no assurance."

As Aisha studied the Bible and attended church, she discovered that Jesus has already accomplished everything for her salvation on the cross.

Listen to what Paul is writing to young Timothy: "That's why I stick it out here—so that everyone God calls will get in on the salvation of Christ in all its glory. This is a sure thing:

If we die with him, we'll live with him;

If we stick it out with him, we'll rule with him;

If we turn our backs on him, he'll turn his back on us;

If we give up on him, he does not give up—

for there's no way he can be false to himself." (2 Tim 2:10-13 MSG)

Paul joyfully proclaims, "I'm in jail, but God's Word isn't in jail!"

Aisha had come to the moment she felt ready to tell her husband about her new faith. It didn't go well. Her husband sued her in Sharia court, demanding all her possessions and both their children. Sharia law rules in that part of Nigeria, but Christian friends and Aisha's pastor advocated for her case to be heard in

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magistrate court. If the case had been decided in Sharia court, she would have lost her children.

When she would not renounce her faith, her husband divorced her and allowed her to have custody of the children. Aisha and her son moved out, but her daughter chose to stay with her father. There were hard times. Even some Christian friends were afraid of Muslim violence if they supported her. Aisha's former husband burned down her house in the town. Coming out of Islam can result in being stoned to death. Aisha's parents sided with her former husband, because he had been a good provider. Under all the pressure, her son (Abdullahi) returned to his father.

Aisha's church family helped her move to another town and provided the means to get her into a house of her own. Pressures eased and Abdullahi, influenced by his mother's faith, came to live with her in the new home. He began to follow Jesus. Faiza, Aisha's daughter, was introduced to Jesus through friends at school. When her father learned of it, he said, "Leave my house before I kill you." Aisha now has both her children with her in the new situation.

Aisha still lives with the stress of knowing that her former husband and his family are searching for her to kill her. She continues to receive text messages urging her to return to Islam or else be killed. At 43, Aisha is studying to become a minister. Knowing God has given her whole life purpose. "God created us to be His followers," she says, "to worship Him and be obedient to Him."

Jesus is always calling, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Mt 11:28 NASB) Even in our troubles, pain and sorrow, Jesus provides the help of the Holy Spirit and the assurance of abundant life. The Word of God cannot be suppressed or contained – in a prison, in persecution, public or private. Jesus, the Word made flesh, is near. Amen.