

Kirkwall Presbyterian Church
'The Meeting Place'
Acts 12:1-19
May 10, 2026
By Keith Marcy

In the passage Robert will read for us this morning, see if you can pick out the name of a woman who owns a house in Jerusalem, and name of the servant girl who works for her.

Canada has been blessed with the lives and service of many brave women. One that comes to mind is Laura Secord, who lived near Queenston during the war of 1812. Somehow, she heard that the Americans were planning an attack at Queenston. She walked about 20 miles to warn the British military. She led one of her cows to disguise her mission. To a passerby, she looked like a farm wife leading a stray cow home. Because of her message, the British were ready to drive the Americans home.

Another woman lived south of Brantford. One of her children died from drinking milk containing harmful bacteria. This woman, Adelaide Hunter Hoodless, persuaded the government to put a law in place that all milk sold to the public must be pasteurized. You may be here today because your great grandparents lived due to bacteria free milk.

We could talk about Agnes McPhail, the first woman M.P. She was an M.P. for 19 years, then an M.P.P. in Ontario for 8 or 9 years. One of her aims was to benefit women - 'equal pay for equal work.'

Hazel McCallion was mayor of Mississauga for 36 years. When she retired from politics, she left a city that was debt-free

However, this morning I want to look at the Scripture Robert read.

Did you find the name of a woman? [*Mary, the mother of Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark*]

And her servant girl? [*Rhoda*]

The passage begins with wicked Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who had ordered the infants killed in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth. Herod had already had the disciple, James, killed. Now he had his army arrest Peter. Peter's future looked grim. If you were in the life insurance business, you would not be writing up a policy for him to sign.

Here is the scene: The night before Peter was to appear for trial, he was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains. Sentries guarded the prison gate.

Meanwhile, the Church – the body of believers – have gathered at Mary’s house to pray for Peter’s safe release.

What do we know about this Mary?

She was likely a widow. She owns the house, but a husband is never mentioned. She has a son, John Mark, who has been taught the Old Testament and has a keen interest in the Messiah and is serving Him. Mary is not in the peasant class but has some wealth. She has a servant girl. Her house is large enough to host many believers. She is using her wealth for the building up of the Church, quite unlike the rich man we studied on Friday at Bible study, whose wealth had become his idol.

And Mary was a brave woman. This was a time in Jerusalem when those who believed in Jesus were in physical danger. Many had left the city. Some went to Damascus, others to Antioch and Crete. Wherever they went, they took the Message of Jesus with them. Thus, through persecution, the Gospel spread. But Mary chose to stay in Jerusalem, keeping the Word of God alive in that city. Notice, however, the door of her house was locked while believers were inside earnestly praying for Peter’s release. Their bedtime has come and went. In the jail all is quiet. Peter is fast asleep. The lamps have been blown out. Acts 12:7 tells us, *‘Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. He kicked Peter in the side to wake him. “Quick, get up,” he said, and the shackles fell off Peter’s wrists.’*

What of the soldiers?

It would seem they, and the sentries guarding the prison gate were given an anesthetic for they were oblivious to the angel’s presence.

The angel spoke to Peter, *“Get dressed; put on your sandals and wrap your cloak around you.”*

As the angel led him through the passage, the heavy iron door swung open, then closed with a clang. The guards slept. The angel led Peter into the street and walked with him one block, then vanished.

When Peter realized he was free and this was not a dream, he went straight to Mary’s house. He had been there before – this house for believers. He tried the heavy outer door. Locked. He knocked. He knocked again. Finally, he heard Rhoda’s quiet voice, “Who is it.”

“It is Peter, please unbolt the door.”

But Rhoda did not unbolt the door. Instead, she was so excited she ran through the passage and interrupted the prayer meeting. *“Peter is at the gate, knocking. He is alive.”*

There is an unbelievable irony in what follows. The text says *many* people had gathered to pray for Peter’s release. They are in earnest, praying on into the night.

They said to Rhoda, *“You are out of your mind.”*

“No, I am not. I would recognize his voice anywhere.”

One old boy is moved to tears. *“I knew it. They killed him. He is dead. His angel spoke to you!”*

Rhoda would not be dissuaded, *“No, I know Peter’s voice. It is him.”*

Someone, perhaps Mary, accompanied her to the door. Peter is on the outside expecting, at any second, a guard from the jail to grab him from behind. He is pounding now with both fists. *“Unbolt the door!”*

They do. He walks into the room. They are astonished. They cannot believe their eyes. They want to touch him. Is he for real? Unbelievable.

We do the same thing. We pray and pray. When God answers, rather than fall on our knees and shout praises to the King, we obey another voice that says, *‘It was not really a miracle. It would have happened anyway.’*

And Mary, a fearless believer, a hospitable good generous person, full of faith in calling this late-night prayer meeting, is initially caught up with the rest, and doubts that God would hear them and miraculously send an angel to Peter in prison. She is not Mrs. Superwoman. Her faith is real, though not flawless. Yet God used her to protect and grow His church.

And therefore, He can use us – if we have faith as big as a tiny mustard seed.

Mary ought to be an example for us to follow. She used her material possessions to aid the Church so that the Gospel would be heard. In the midst of danger, she chose to remain in Jerusalem. Her home was an open haven for the followers of Jesus – Peter had been there before, likely many times! She took a leadership role in calling and hosting a prayer meeting, even though she was a woman. I think in the eyes of God she was a gem! God needs Gems! Not people who have flawless faith; just people of faith! And courage! And a determined resolve to do what they can, often quietly, behind the scenes, in order that some will hear the Gospel of Christ and believe—and by believing, be saved!! Can God count on you??