

The story of Dirk Willems



Dirk Willems was one of many fugitive Christians, called Anabaptists, arrested and imprisoned in the 1500s.

Unlike many others, Dirk escaped from the prison tower he was locked in. He tied together strips of cloth to make a rope, which he used to slide down the prison wall. But as he set out across the countryside, a guard spotted him and chased him. In Dirk's path of escape was an ice-covered pond. He took the risk and crossed the thin ice safely. Dirk had lost a lot of weight while in prison because he wasn't fed very well, so that's why he didn't break the ice. The guard, however, was too heavy. When he crossed the lake after Dirk, he fell through the ice into the freezing water.

Dirk asked himself, "Was this God's rescue? Has God saved me from my enemies?" After praying, Dirk realized the answer was, "no." For Dirk, this was a call to help someone in need. He believed in Jesus's teaching to love even our enemies. So Dirk turned back and rescued the guard. Dirk saved his enemy.

Afterward, Dirk was arrested again and placed in a more secure prison. He was later burned at the stake near his native village, Asperen, in 1569.