

Death Row Inmate Scheduled for Execution Today: 'I'm Loved by The Lord'

Headlines proclaim Mark Asay's name today, as he's scheduled to be put to death at 6 p.m. for the murder of two men.

If executed, he will be the first white man in Florida put to death for killing a black man. He's also set to receive a lethal injection never before used in the United States.

As the hours tick by, he's still fighting for his life, but he's not concerned about death.

"I'm a Christian, and I'm born again," Asay tells reporter Tom Wills. "I'm loved by the Lord. I'm 100 percent confident that if I'm going to get relief here, it's because of the truth. And if I'm not going to get relief here, it's because the Lord knows that my life here on earth will not be productive. Because I pray, and I say, 'I've had all of the prison I want. So I want out of prison—through the front door or the back.'"

But some question the authenticity of his faith. While in prison, Asay joined a white supremacist gang and has the tattoos to prove it.

"I got these tattoos when I was incarcerated in Texas. I was 19 years old, forced to survive in a hostile prison environment, and I got these tattoos in that environment so that I could blend in so that I could be safe in that environment. They are not representative at all of who I am, but they are tattoos, and they're not easily removed. They're easy to put on, but they're not easy to remove, and so I've had to live with them. I have covered them up. I had a swastika on my elbow; I covered that up. I had an SWP on my arm; I burned it off. I've removed every racial tattoo I had,

except for the ones that I can't reach," Asay says.

Asay was incarcerated in Texas for grand theft auto, among other charges. While on probation, he killed black man Robert Lee Booker. A jury also found him guilty of murdering transvestite Robert "Rene" McDowell, who was Hispanic. Asay says he only killed Booker, though.

That was 36 years ago. Asay says he's a changed man with a testimony.

"If the purpose of prison is not accomplished now, it's never going to be accomplished. If the purpose is just to protect me from society and protect society from me, OK, I accept that, but I'm saying I'm not a violent person or a threat to society. But if the government is like, 'Well, we can't be sure,' then I'm prepared to submit to the execution Thursday and go on and be at peace with my Lord," Asay says. "But if society can be benefited from having somebody like me give a testimony that a person should be more concerned about living than appearances, then here I am, but we've got to come to the table. Everybody made mistakes."

Asay's not the only one to encounter Christ behind bars.

As Charisma News previously reported, Kenneth Williams, one of several men executed in rapid succession in Arkansas this year, was ordained during incarceration.

"Mrs. Williams (No relation to me) but the mother of the late 19-year-old Dominique Hurd, whom I senselessly murdered, took the stand having suffered great loss, and she shared these words: 'I forgive Kenneth Williams. My daughter Dominique 'Nikki' Hurd was a forgiven person.' She said, 'I do not wish for him to be put to death. His death won't bring my daughter back.' She went on to say, 'I pray that before Kenneth Williams leaves this world he will give his heart to Jesus,'" Williams wrote before his death.

The post, and dozens more, is shared on a public Facebook page dedicated to remembering Williams.

At the time of his death, Williams completed multiple courses through Crossroads Bible Institute, including a Master's degree in Religion from Universal Life Church.

"That marvelous light that shined forth that day out of Mrs. Williams acted as a planted seed into the soil of my life. Years later, it would yield something special and God's bread," Williams said.

Daniel Lachance, a historian of the modern American death penalty, has even more stories:

Those on both sides of the political spectrum have been moved by stories of a condemned person's transformation.

In the 1990s, conservative evangelical minister Pat Robertson led a campaign to save the life of Karla Faye Tucker, a Texas woman whose "genuine change of heart" seemed so authentic that it forced him to rethink his support of the death penalty.

In the 2000s, a decidedly more progressive set of advocates tried to stop the execution of Stanley "Tookie" Williams in California. Williams, a cofounder of the Crips street gang, had been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for his anti-gang activism from death row. To execute him would be to execute a man who no longer existed, they argued.

But these well-publicized campaigns, and their less-visible counterparts, have failed. Tucker was executed in 1998; Williams in 2005.

Redeemed, But Not Saved

Just this past September, Pope Francis pleaded with the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles to spare the life of

Kelly Gissendaner, a woman who planned her husband's murder in 1998.

In her decade-and-a-half stay on death row, Gissendaner had earned a theological certificate and struck up a friendship with the internationally renowned German theologian Jürgen Moltmann. A photo of her graduation from her theology program shows her proudly showing Moltmann her final project for the class: a devotional called Journey of Hope by Faith.

Gissendaner's redemption did not matter. Georgia executed her on Sept. 30.

Not everyone finds solace, however.

In an informal survey with the *Texas Observer*, Alex Hannaford found a little more than 63 percent said they believed in God before they were sent to death row. Fifteen said they weren't believers when they arrived at the Polunsky Unit. Three men—7 percent of those polled—said they had lost their faith while awaiting execution. Another three said they had converted to Christianity. Two claimed to have discovered Judaism. None said they were Muslim.

By the end of tonight, Florida's Asay will know his temporary outcome. If he's put to death, he says he'll be in heaven, but he's still praying for mercy to stay on this earth.