

“Don’t Be Terrified”
1 Peter 3:8-22
5.17.20
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
6th Sunday of Easter
10th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic

1 Peter 3:8-22 CEB

8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, sympathetic, lovers of your fellow believers, compassionate, and modest in your opinion of yourselves. **9** Don’t pay back evil for evil or insult for insult. Instead, give blessing in return. You were called to do this so that you might inherit a blessing.

10 *For those who want to love life and see good days should keep their tongue from evil speaking and their lips from speaking lies.* **11** *They should shun evil and do good; seek peace and chase after it.* **12** *The Lord’s eyes are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayers. But the Lord cannot tolerate those who do evil.* **13** Who will harm you if you are zealous for good? **14** But happy are you, even if you suffer because of righteousness! Don’t be terrified or upset by them. **15** Instead, regard Christ the Lord as holy in your hearts. Whenever anyone asks you to speak of your hope, be ready to defend it. **16** Yet do this with respectful humility, maintaining a good conscience. Act in this way so that those who malign your good lifestyle in Christ may be ashamed when they slander you. **17** It is better to suffer for doing good (if this could possibly be God’s will) than for doing evil. **18** Christ himself suffered on account of sins, once for all, the righteous one on behalf of the unrighteous. He did this in order to bring you into the presence of God. Christ was put to death as a human, but made alive by the Spirit. **19** And it was by the Spirit that he went to preach to the spirits in prison. **20** In the past, these spirits were disobedient—when God patiently waited during the time of Noah. Noah built an ark in which a few (that is, eight) lives were rescued through water. **21** Baptism is like that. It saves you now—not because it removes dirt from your body but because it is the mark of a good conscience toward God. Your salvation comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

22 who is at God's right side. Now that he has gone into heaven, he rules over all angels, authorities, and powers.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

On Wednesday, I was taking our new dog, Murphy, to the vet for a routine visit. I had the radio to NPR and I listened to part of a segment on *On Point* segment called "Childhood and Coronavirus: How Times of Crisis Shape Kids." On part of the show, Meghna Chakrabarti interviewed Pauline Arnett Hodges. Ms. Hodges is 90 years old and grew up in Oklahoma on a farm. In fact, Pauline Hodges was born about 2 months before the stock market crash which ushered in the era of the Great Depression.

Things were not great, but Hodges' family was able to make ends meet for a while. The children, of course, were still able to play outside. It was bad, but it seemed manageable.

Then, a year or so passes by after Pauline's birth and farmers are facing a harsher reality. Sure, the Great Depression was wiping them out and there wasn't much demand for their products. But, something far worse was happening: The Dust Bowl. For five or so years, farming in the Southern Plains of the U.S. was essentially impossible. Weeks of little to no rain turned into years. Farmers, crop, and livestock perished. People had to wear goggles and masks to be outside. A nation on the brink of collapse had to deal with a depressed agricultural system that made the crisis worse. Does some of this sound familiar?

A crisis in a crisis. And Pauline Hodges was living right in the epicenter of the Dust Bowl. To make things worse, the bank foreclosed on the family's farm in 1935 and Ms. Hodges' family was without a place to live. According to Pauline Hodges:

"My parents had the place half paid for when they lost it."

A crisis within a crisis within a crisis.

A child of around 6 years old and already, trauma was her life's destiny or so it seemed.

Eventually, Pauline's father, Paul, entered into the Works Progress Administration that helped unskilled people who were jobless to carry out public works projects. This was part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal to help get the country through the economic crisis to only face another crisis: World War II.

After the war, Pauline Hodges graduated from school and became a teacher. It wasn't her intention to do so, but it became her passion. She wanted to help children. And I imagine that goes back to her early years. And if we take a moment to think about it, the first 16 years of her life were during one crisis or another. Yet, she wanted to help others. In the interview, Ms. Hodges reflected on the good things she learned about the Depression and the Dust Bowl. She learned to be frugal. And she learned to be giving because someone needed compassion and for this now 90- year-old woman, the only person who could show any compassion to someone in need may be her.

I think of Pauline Hodges' story and what we've read today in 1 Peter 3:8-22. For the 1st century Christians living under the regime of Rome's Emperor, they had to face many obstacles. They've turned away from blindly following Rome and its gods, including the Emperor. They've given up any social standing they might have had and they've been shunned by their families and friends.

Yet, Peter tells them to be compassionate to their fellow believers AND to never repay evil for evil. Instead, as it says in verse 9, "give blessing in return." Peter is not only telling the Gentile

Christians to be compassionate to other Christians. He's telling them to not stoop to the level of those slandering them simply because they are Christian. Give blessing instead of insult.

For these early Christians, they may have also been feeling the stress of rejecting Rome's ways. Yet, God desires for all of us to act out of love, not from evil intent. To get his point across, 1 Peter 3:10-12 quotes Psalm 34:12-16. He's encouraging the Christians to not fall back into their old ways, but to "seek peace and go after it" because that pleases the LORD and God watches the righteous and hears their cries. And if anyone should slander these devout Christians, "don't be terrified", Peter says. It's simply not worth it.

I can't imagine what it's like to turn away from my friends and family simply because of my faith like our ancestors did in the ancient Roman Empire. I also can't imagine feeling the financial stress our forebears faced when they had to make hard decisions on who to worship: God or the Emperor. Yet, throughout Peter's letter, they are encouraged to remain focused on their LORD and Savior Jesus Christ. The Savior so perfect who died for imperfect people who was raised from the dead. And in our Baptism, we have put on Christ, the great Foundation and Cornerstone of our faith who taught us how to live.

However, while I have not lived Pauline Hodges' life, I can relate to her story a little more these days. I can safely say that most of us today can resonate with her story more than before the pandemic. But no matter the severity of the crisis, it doesn't have the final word. God has the final word. And in that word is Christ's life, ministry, death, and resurrection.

Christ was compassionate to those who needed compassion. He also spoke truth to power, which is what got him in a lot of trouble. Peter's words today point to that. Regardless of circumstances, whether they look like Peter's audience or Pauline Arnett Hodges or something else, we are to reflect our compassionate Savior's life. Now more than ever does this world need a dose of compassion.

Beloved, through this crisis and all the crises we are facing right now, it will be the Holy Spirit who will get us through this mess. By the power of the Spirit, we can be the beacon of hope and compassion that so many people need right now, regardless if they happen to believe the same things we do. Everyone needs Good News and we are to boldly proclaim that Good News of God's love for a hurting world.

Siblings in Christ, be encouraged.

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.