

“Like a Child at Home”
1 Peter 2:19-25
5.3.20
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
4th Sunday of Easter
8th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic

1 Peter 2:19-25 CEB

19 Now, it is commendable if, because of one’s understanding of God, someone should endure pain through suffering unjustly. 20 But what praise comes from enduring patiently when you have sinned and are beaten for it? But if you endure steadfastly when you’ve done good and suffer for it, this is commendable before God.

21 You were called to this kind of endurance, because Christ suffered on your behalf. He left you an example so that you might follow in his footsteps. 22 He committed no sin, nor did he ever speak in ways meant to deceive. 23 When he was insulted, he did not reply with insults. When he suffered, he did not threaten revenge. Instead, he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. 24 He carried in his own body on the cross the sins we committed. He did this so that we might live in righteousness, having nothing to do with sin. By his wounds you were healed. 25 Though you were like straying sheep, you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your lives.

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.

Two weeks ago, we started our journey in 1 Peter. Peter, or the person writing in Peter’s name, addresses the Gentile Christians in various congregations across the known world under Roman rule as “strangers living in the world of the diaspora”. These people have turned away from worshiping the Roman Emperor to worshipping the risen Christ. The early Christians in the congregations of Pontus, Cappadocia, Bythnia, Galatia, and Asia have not only turned from the heresy of Rome’s ways, but many have also turned from their families and friends. These 1st century Christians are isolated. And Peter is encouraging them in this hardship.

Last week in 1 Peter 1:13-25, Peter was reminding the Christians of their holiness as God’s children because God is holy. The phrase “you will be holy because I am holy” is used and it is a quotation of Leviticus 19:2. In both instances, God’s people are strangers in a wilderness. And the LORD is having to remind the chosen people of their responsibility as God’s beloved children. Because God is holy, we will be holy. We will be holy, because God is holy.

Peter reminds the 1st century audience and us that the holiness is not a single act, but a lifelong commitment. Like the Hebrews in the desert and the early Christians in the Roman Empire, this journey of holiness takes a lifetime of meaningful work. Being holy

because God is holy means not chasing after the false gods that tempt us—power, money, or lust. We are to reject those gods and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, embrace a lifestyle made possible through the faithful work of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection that reflects our loving and holy God.

This week, we are placed in the tail end of 1 Peter 2. At first glance, you would think this passage addresses the general population. But, it addresses the slaves who were Christian at this time. Frankly, I struggle with the Revised Common Lectionary’s selective verses occasionally. So much gets left out. Really, today’s passage begins at verse 18:

Household slaves, submit by accepting the authority of your masters with all respect. Do this not only to good and kind masters but also to those who are harsh.

Verse 18 starts us out on what is commonly called a “Household Code” that appears also in Colossians and Ephesians. And the household code appearing in 1 Peter continues into chapter three with wives and husbands.

The misuse of these household codes have been the instruments of mass destruction in order to justify slavery and spousal abuse. If I don’t at least mention it, then I am guilty of spiritual malpractice. Additionally, the household codes that appear throughout the New Testament need further disceting. Yet, for today, I’ll have to focus on what’s before us, which takes us to the guidelines given to slaves in the 1st century world.

I should also note that right before the slaves are addressed, Peter gives the Gentile Christians several verses on how to live lives as strangers in the world starting in verse 11. Among the unbelievers, the Christians are to live honorably because while they may be accused for doing evil, unbelievers will eventually honor and glorify God because they have observed these early Christians’ honorable deeds. Also, Peter exhorts these strangers living under Roman rule in verses 13-17 to “submit to every human institution”, respect God, and “honor the emperor”.

Putting some of these pieces of the puzzle together, the household code involving slaves makes it a little more understandable. Every Christian, no matter their status as freed people or slaves, have no choice but to acknowledge the human institutions in the Roman Empire, to respect God, and honor the emperor. They have to do this in order to survive what will eventually become an oppressive regime. The playing field is leveled in verses 11-17, which sets us up for the code regarding slaves.

In her commentary on 1 Peter, Pheme Perkins helps shed some light on the verses concerning slaves. It is possible that the slaves Peter addresses are slaves to non-Christian masters as there is no corresponding “masters” section in this household code. So, let’s go with that possibility. Peter realizes the harsh realities the slaves face in his time. For many, they were abused because of a simple accusation. They had done nothing wrong. These slaves were considered “suffering servants”. The most vulnerable in society and the most ill-treated. Some of these slaves were born into

slavery, some were kidnapped, and others were indebted slaves, having to sell themselves in order to repay money. And these servants had to endure a lot of suffering. More suffering than their freed Christian siblings in other households.

Yet, Peter holds these slaves up first, before everyone else in the household code. They are the most obvious example of how all Christians, regardless of status, are to live in a world where the only gods worshipped were Roman gods and not the God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. The slaves submitting to the authority over them is a reflection of what all Christians are to do at that time: Submit to the Roman institutions and honor the emperor, but most importantly, respect and worship God.

As suffering servants, the slaves give us a picture of another Suffering Servant: Jesus Christ. If the slaves in the 1st century world were to endure, and the other Christians of freed statuses were to endure, they had a perfect role model found in Jesus Christ. God who became human who entered this world on the margins of the Roman Empire who endured harshly for being innocent. Because Christ suffered on their behalf, Peter argues that the early Christians are to follow his footsteps. In this harsh reality they faced either as slaves or freed people, all of them fell under the evil Roman Empire's thumb. Eventually, each person would have to endure some sort of suffering.

If Christ is the ultimate example, hope, and comfort for this 1st century audience, then we, in 2020, who are "strangers living in the world of the diaspora" and we who "will be holy because [God is] holy", have the same example, hope, and comfort found only in Christ during our hardship. The hardship is not the same as our ancestors 2,000 years ago, but there is hardship. We live in an increasingly hostile world. A lot of that hostility, I argue, comes from people pretending to act in Jesus' name through the acts of hate crimes against people of color and different religious beliefs. What used to be considered fringy hate speech has become mainstream and it continues to get worse through this pandemic.

Yet, it is through Christ, the Suffering Servant, who shows us a better way to live. As Peter describes our Savior in the final verses of chapter 2, Christ didn't reply to insults with insults. Christ didn't respond with threats. Instead, he took our sins on the cross and through his wounds, he healed us. And we, like wandering sheep who have no clue what's going on, have been rescued by "the Shepherd and Guardian of our lives".

Siblings in Christ, may these words from Peter encourage us. May Jesus Christ's life be our example, comfort, and hope in these uncertain days. Friends, believe this Good News!

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