

**Fourth Sunday of Easter – May7, 2017**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**  
*Pastor Charles Heup*

**1 Peter 2:19 - 25 (NIV)**

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. (20) But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. (21) To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. (22) "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." (23) When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. (24) "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." (25) **For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.**

Fellow lambs and sheep of the Good Shepherd

We are born in pain, suffer pain through the crises of life and, except for a fortunate few, we die in pain. More than 100 million Americans suffer from chronic pain at a cost of around \$600 billion a year in medical treatments and lost productivity, according to a report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM).

People will buy anything that promises relief, from aspirin to magnets. One look at the pain relief section of your local drugstore where Americans spend \$3 billion yearly will point out the ongoing battle we all wage with pain. Annually over \$17 billion is spent on prescription pain medications alone.

But sadly as one doctor wrote: *Pain all too often seems a mystery to patient and health-care provider alike.*

Our text talks about pain – the unjust pain and suffering Christians may endure because of their faith. But more importantly it tells us about the pain Jesus endured as our Good Shepherd to rescue us from eternal suffering.

**Theme:** We Have a Good Shepherd

1. Who understands our needs and suffering
2. Who rescued us from our sufferings by his own suffering

Unlike many caregivers, Jesus understands our needs and suffering. That was one of the thoughts Peter used to comfort the Christian slaves whom he was addressing in this text. When Peter wrote, **it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.,** he was merely restating and applying what Jesus had already taught in his sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5:11-12 NIV) **"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. (12) Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven..."**

The individuals to whom Peter was writing were being mistreated because they had chosen to be loyal to Christ. In such a situation, they might have easily given in to the temptations to become bitter, to speak evil of their masters, and to grow lax in their responsibilities. They may have even been tempted to grow bitter toward Christ and to forsake their faith in order to gain some temporary relief. The first set of actions would be a poor witness of their faith; the second would result in a denial of their salvation.

Peter points out the best course of action: He encourages them to bear the pain of unjust suffering for the sake of conscience. The fact that they are being sinned against does not give them the right to commit the

sin of retaliation. Such an attitude is commendable before God, as Jesus made clear in the words from the Sermon on the Mount we have just heard. Peter is careful to put things into perspective for us. The suffering that results in blessings is undeserved. **But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.**

Anyone who would rebel against those who were over them would be rebelling against the Lord because the authorities that exist are from God. That's why Peter began this section with the words: **Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.** If these slaves would rebel against their masters or fail to carry out their duties, they would become unfaithful to the Lord and place themselves under his judgment. Those actions would be sinful, not praiseworthy. They had been called to follow the Lord's way – the way of love.

With his many words and with his actions Jesus, our Good Shepherd shows that he knows and understands the troubles, sufferings, and pains that Christians might experience because of their faith. Although you and I, thankfully, are not in the same situation as the slaves to whom Peter was writing in our text we still frequently find ourselves in need of comfort and encouragement in the trying, difficult and sometimes painful situations of life. No matter what the trouble, God has not withdrawn his sympathetic caring hand from our lives. If we are tormented by our sins, we have God's assurance that Jesus suffered for them. If we are troubled by those who find ways to embarrass us or mock us or maybe even subtly persecute us for our faith, we know that God will ultimately vindicate our cause in his just judgment. Should we be tried by sickness or adversity, we can look to him who is our Shepherd and know that we rest secure in his loving hands. We have a Good Shepherd who understands every kind of suffering and pain even though he himself was without sin.

It was because Jesus understood our greatest needs and our greatest source of pain that he came as our Good Shepherd to rescue and deliver us from sin and its terrible consequences. In order to accomplish our rescue Jesus suffered for us. Our text reminds us that Jesus suffering accomplished our rescue by reminding us that we have been called to do what is praiseworthy and to be willing to suffer for it. **To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. (22) "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." (23) When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.**

It should not surprise us that from time to time the devil will find ways to make life difficult for Christians including us. As Jesus' disciples, we have been called to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses and to follow him. In this way, we are to be like Jesus not only in suffering evil but also in our attitude toward suffering. Christ suffered for us and has gained forgiveness of sins and eternal life for us. There is nothing we need to do. Our suffering in no way contributes to our salvation – but at times, it is the result of our relationship with Christ. When that happens Jesus serves as an example for us in how to deal with it. Peter speaks of him as a pattern for us to follow – like students who trace letters to learn how to write the alphabet so we can follow in the path that Christ has traced out for us. He suffered for us -- the righteous for the unrighteous and now we have been called to suffer for him and to follow his steps.

Anyone who has watched a little boy trying to follow his father's footsteps in the snow knows what Peter means here. As that little boy carefully avoids stepping outside of the print of his father's boots so Christians will try to match exactly the life and footsteps of Christ.

Christ's suffering was totally undeserved. He was holy and sinless. He was declared innocent of any crimes by Pontius Pilate and yet he was delivered over to the executioners to be crucified on the cross. Never did our Lord resort to deceit or tricks or guile when he dealt with his accusers. He silenced them with his truth.

And yet in spite of his totally sinless life, he was persecuted, mistreated and crucified. Through it all he never threatened or cursed or insulted his tormenters but rather in perfect love we hear him pray: **Father, forgive them.** He placed himself into the care of his heavenly Father and was willing to submit to his will at any cost. And the cost was high for Jesus – in keeping with the Father’s will he was abandoned by God as he suffered our hell on the cross – he offered his precious blood as a sacrifice for our sin. He was punished in place. Peter summarizes it so well in our text: **"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."**

Just as Jesus put his Father’s will first so we are called to put God first and our comforts and desires second. And we do this in thankfulness and love for what Christ has done for us. Don’t make the mistake of only looking at Jesus as an example to follow for it is impossible for us to walk the perfect path he walked. Jesus is above all our Savior and it is Peter’s intention in all that he has written to focus our attention on all that Christ has done for us. Jesus is our Savior the one who removed our sins by carrying them to cross where he was punished for them. Christ is the one who enables us to live a new life – one in which we have died to sin and live for righteousness in imitation of Christ.

Because of all that Christ suffered for us, we can patiently suffer and follow in his steps confident that the Father who vindicated Jesus will also vindicate us in the final judgment for his sake.

We have been healed by the wounds of Christ. His pain removes our pain. We can’t help but call to mind the words of the prophet Isaiah regarding the suffering servant as we hear Peter speak of the healing power of Christ’s wounds. (Isaiah 53:4-5) **Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. (5) But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.**

Jesus’ wounds, caused by the beatings and the nails, trickling with blood bought healing for us as well as for the slaves to whom Peter was writing. Peter’s words would have struck a familiar cord with the slaves who had been beaten. They could relate to the pain that Jesus felt – the bruises and wounds he had suffered. He had endured it all for them. How could they now reject that and refuse to suffer for him. With a final word of encouragement Peter reminds us all of what it means to be without Christ. That is a far worse situation than any situation we might experience because of our connection to Christ.

**For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.** Without Christ, we are like sheep wandering around on our own with no one to watch over us, to care for us or to protect us. But now because of what Jesus has done we have a loving Shepherd – one who knows us by name – one who watches over us and cares for us in all of needs – and is even willing to lay down his life for us. Sheep without a shepherd are doomed to perish. They would easily become choice prey for wild animals. So we would be easy prey for the devil who wanders around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. But with Christ as our Shepherd and the Caretaker of our souls we are safe. He leads us gently toward our eternal home. In every situation, he is aware of our condition. Those are comforting thoughts – thoughts that relieve pain that no pain medication could ever touch.

The pain that Jesus relieves is a universal pain – 100% of all people suffer from sin. All need to know that we have a Good Shepherd who understands our needs and suffering and who rescued us from our sufferings by his own suffering. And the amazing thing about this pain reliever is that it offered to us by Christ at no cost to us at all. That’s the amazing gift of God that we enjoy through faith in Jesus our Good Shepherd. Amen.