

“LIVING WELL WHEN LIFE DOESN’T GO WELL.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: I Peter 3:8-12

Prayer: Holy Father, may the words of my mouth and the responses of all our hearts glorify you, exalt Jesus, honor your Word and edify your people according to our need. Come, Holy Spirit, help us I pray.

Introduction.

Last week on vacation our son, Reed, set us up on an open air jeep tour of the interior of Catalina Island. It was four hours over rugged terrain on winding dirt roads. There were steep sections, sometimes climbing to two thousand feet and dropping down to sea level. There were beautiful overlooks and scary narrow cliff hangers. And there were obstacles, like bison on the road.

It was a pretty good snapshot of life. Life is a long journey over some pretty rugged terrain. There are flat, smooth stretches with glimpses of beauty and then there are ups and downs, twists and turns, bumps in the road, and unexpected obstacles. Sometimes they are manageable, sometimes overwhelming. Just ask any of our members dealing with cancer or death.

Sometimes the challenges come from circumstances, health, finances, personal issues, and sometimes they are from other people. How do we deal with the challenges of life when they are other people, whether strangers, relatives, or even people in our church?

Our text is very practical, it’s about how to relate to those around us, especially those with whom we have difficulties, even those who may be hostile toward us, or heaven forbid, toward whom we may feel hostile.

Verse 8, five marks of being well.

Peter lists five virtues if actively applied will lead to many blessings and what he calls the good life. He is telling us what we *should be like*, not just what we *should do*. Do you chaff a bit at being told what kind of person you should be? Or are you humbled by God’s words to us?

Before we dig into them, please remember that for us to be like this is impossible if we have not been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Peter 1:3). This is the work of the Holy Spirit transforming us and conforming us to the likeness of Christ.

This is the fruit in a person called out of darkness, out of sin, out of selfishness and self-centeredness, and into the marvelous light of His mercy and grace.

This is a call to live a gracious life. Life is harsh, cruel, demeaning, hurtful, challenging, and Peter calls us to answer all of that graciously.

Unity of mind, harmonious.

What does unity of mind mean? It means being in the same mind toward one another. We care about being together, not separate or at odds.

It doesn't have to mean total agreement, but respect and deference in disagreement.

In the words of Francis Schaeffer it means the world needs to see us Christians having our differences in a way that's different than the way the world has its differences. The world needs to see Christians having differences while also having an observable unity.

How do we practice harmony while maintaining a love for Biblical truth and morality? Are these two things mutually exclusive? We hold together uncompromised principles and uncompromised unity. Sometimes we must agree to disagree, but we do it agreeably.

This is not a call to sacrifice truth on the altar of unity and harmony, but to sacrifice personal feelings on the altar. We can live in harmony with a person who has offended us, if we die to ourselves and put them above ourselves.

If someone starts sinning in an open and public way, does harmony and love and unity require that we quietly endure it and say nothing? That is not love, that is hate. That is complete disregard for that person's eternal soul. Love is honest, love is principled, love sounds a clear note but in a way that seeks peace and is non-retaliatory.

Sympathy.

Sympathy means a person feels what others are feeling without saying, "I know how you feel." Sympathy rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with those who weep.

We are glad for their successes and achievements, we are sad for their defeats and failures. In other words, we care as much about others as we do ourselves.

Brotherly love.

Brotherly love draws our attention especially to fellow church members, love for the brethren and sistren.

In other words, we don't treat each other as strangers or distant relatives, but as brothers and sisters, close family, people we actually care about. This is family love, the best kind of love.

God is our Father, so our love toward one another is family, brother and sister, closer than blood brothers and sisters.

Jesus calls us to a high standard to love one another, to have a growing affection toward one another. It's a high standard that is constantly under threat and attack. Every day there are new challenges to love and love again.

Tender heart, kindhearted.

A tender heart is caring and compassionate, not just in action but in feeling. This is about your gut response to each other, a response that is a gracious spirit, a generous spirit, a kind and caring spirit.

We cut each other slack, we don't take up offenses quickly, we forgive quickly, we seek out, we don't push away. We speak well of each other and don't take pot shots, we don't criticize, we don't point out weaknesses or failures or mistakes.

This is a most God-like emotion. God is compassionate and kind hearted, His love is a covenant kindness, full and free and generous.

Humble mind, humble spirit.

A humble person is a person that knows they are weak and dependent, that apart from God they are nothing and have nothing and can do nothing. A humble person suppresses the urge to be important, to be first, to be thought highly of, to get their own way. This person considers others more important than themselves and is willing to put the interests of others ahead of their own.

Many of our arguments and fights come from lack of humility. Pride is a killer of community, pride kills intimacy and openness and safety in relationships. Pride leads us to think too highly of ourselves and look down on others and despise our neighbors.

Where do we find people with these five kinds of characteristics? They aren't common, we aren't generally born like this. This is the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a person born again by God's grace through Jesus Christ. These are unnatural things because they are spiritual things.

If all of us did all of these, can you picture what kind of church this would be and can you picture what kind of reputation we would have in our community?

What if you aren't like this? Do you want to be? Are you willing to trust in God's grace and water these seeds that are in you by the Spirit?

Verse 9, when things don't go well; blessed to be a blessing.

How are we to live when things don't go well, when the world seems against us, when we live in a hostile culture, or even among family and friends who are less than kind? How do you preserve these five attitudes or virtues when things are said or done that hurt you?

Remember Jesus' words in 2:23:

I Peter 2:23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Romans 12:20-21 "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Revenge is ungodly and does not lead to a well-lived life. Don't speak evil about another person. Don't add evil words to evil words. Do the opposite, return good for evil. Let every evil word or action be an opportunity to speak or do good.

But you say, they have done evil. They have hurt you deeply, you say. They have done nothing to deserve any goodness or kindness, you say.

Jesus said love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your Father in heaven (Matthew 4:44-45), that you may be like God, reflecting His image.

"Bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing."

What is our calling? To bless others even when they do evil against us, to bless others even when they speak poorly about us or negatively against us.

Our calling is not just to take no revenge, it's not just to make no payback or seek retaliation. Peter takes it to the next level. What is pleasing to God is when we bless those who hurt us.

Our calling is to bear patiently with insults and offenses and unkindnesses. When we are called a name we don't call one back, when we are flipped off, we don't respond in kind, when we are hurt we don't hurt back. When someone does us wrong, we don't get even or even think about it. When we are taken advantage of we don't try to even the scales.

I am pretty sure I would be safe in saying every one of us in this room has someone with whom we could take up this challenge, this calling and bless them.

Why is this our calling?

I Peter 2:21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

That's our calling according to the example of Christ, that's our calling if we bear His name and be called Christians.

The reason we don't return evil for evil is because God hasn't returned evil to us when we deserved it. People who don't return evil for evil show they are born again, they show that they get it, they see what Christ did and what God does for us and they imitate that.

The greatest example of this is our conversion. While we were ungodly and doing ungodly things God loved us. Our salvation and our inheritance of eternal life are based on One who did not return evil for evil, on One who did not seek retaliation.

We bless and pray for an ungodly ruler or an unjust boss or a difficult husband or hard to understand wife. A Christian is a person who lives graciously and who blesses, who is a blessing to others.

Are you so aware of your blessings that you can't help yourself, you just overflow with blessings to others? What do you have to lose? How will blessing an enemy diminish you in any way? You already have your inheritance. It is kept safe in heaven for you.

Verses 10-12, three marks of doing well.

Peter quotes from the OT to give the grounds for saying what he says. Psalm 34 is an amazing psalm and the perfect text for Peter's letter.

Some of the Psalm's come with a little heading that tells us something about the occasion of its writing. At the top of Psalm 34 it says: "A Psalm of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away."

This psalm was written by David during a time of great stress and relational trial. King Saul who had taken David into his palace later turned against David and was out to kill him. David was running for his life. At one point he sought refuge in the land of King Abimelech but realized he was in danger there also, so he acted crazy, and fled again.

The point is David was being treated unjustly and unfairly by one who was in authority over him. David was hiding out in caves just trying to stay one step ahead of being killed. Twice he had an opportunity to kill King Saul and both times he didn't.

Listen to the words of King Saul after learning about each of those opportunities David didn't take.

I Samuel 24:16-17, 19 Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. 17 He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me

good, whereas I have repaid you evil. ... 19 ... So may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day.

After the second time David calls out and Saul answers:

I Samuel 26:23, 25 “The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the Lord's anointed.” ... 25 Then Saul said to David, “Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them.”

Here is a real life situation and one that is worse than anything any of us have faced. We don't have someone hating us so much that they are actively trying to kill us.

Yet David kept his tongue from evil and turned away from doing evil and did good, he sought and pursued a path of peace. He blessed and heard the words from his enemy, “Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them.”

The good life and good days are found in *three ways*.

First, we must speak no evil. Much in life depends on our self-control and our ability to control our tongues.

Second, we must do no evil. A good life is found in doing good, in bringing good out of evil.

Third, seek peace and pursue it.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers.

Romans 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Hebrews 12:14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Not just be peaceful when it comes, but seek it, especially when it seems to be eluding us.

Are you seeking it, are you pursuing? Or are you waiting for them to make the first move? Are you committed to finding and building and making peace even if your first attempts fail?

Implications and Application.

We are constantly being warned about scams, about ways people try to take advantage of us and steal our personal information. We are warned about IRS scams and computer repair scams and Nigerian email scams. The Bellingham Herald had another story on Wednesday of a new scam in the area.

People are out there trying to scam us and *we are oblivious to Satan's constant scams*. He is constantly baiting us, tempting us, stirring us up to offenses, to criticisms, to gossip and slander, to backbiting, to giving the cold shoulder or silent treatment.

Satan's scams have been around since the beginning of time. "Did he really say that? What did he mean by that? Can you believe he did that or said that?"

Satan scamming us to anger, bitterness, hate, unkindness, meanspiritedness. We are being played by Satan every day through social media, conversations, chance encounters.

Who has Satan been baiting you over? Who are you out of harmony with? Who are you not talking to or avoiding? Why?

When we are free in Christ, we are free to love, to honor others, to make allowances for others.

With whom can you put these things into practice this week? Who can you bless because of the blessing you have already received and because of the blessing that is yours to come?

Prayer: Blessed be you, our God and Father. We bless you and praise you for your Word to us and for the example of David and of Christ and the encouragement we can draw from their lives in how we also by your Spirit may live graciously in a hard and hostile world and how having been blessed over and over again, we may be a blessing to others. Help us as we go from this place to be well and to live well and to do good.