

## **“SUFFERING WITH HOPE.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

**April 24, 2016, 10:30AM**

**Text for the Sermon: I Peter 3:13-17**

**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.**

Parents, summer is coming soon and I encourage you to get your kids off the screens and into the imaginative world of reading. Maybe cut a deal with them, for every minute of screen time there has to be a minute of reading time. I say this to recommend the children’s books by the Christian author N.D. Wilson.

He writes stories of adventure and danger and darkness because

“... every single mortal child is growing into a life story in a world full of dangers and beauties. Every one will have struggles and ultimately, every one will face death and loss. The goal isn’t to steer kids into stories of darkness because those are the stories that grip readers. The goal is to put the darkness in its place. ... In the end good wins. Always” (N.D. Wilson).

A hundred years ago another great author put it this way:

“Fairy tales (stories with scary beasts and dragons) are not responsible for producing in children fear, ... fairy tales do not give the child the idea of the evil or the ugly; that is in the child already, because it is in the world already. Fairy tales do not give the child his first idea of bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The [child] has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon” (G. K. Chesteron).

Books like that are honest and that’s what our kids need and what will prepare them for the world. Another honest book of course is the Bible. It is filled with violent and dark stories, stories of defeat and victory, death and resurrection. It has the dragons of suffering and sin and Satan. It tells it like it is. That’s certainly what Peter does dealing with fear and suffering and evil.

### **Facing fear fearlessly**

Peter starts with question that is worded in such a way to imply a favorable answer.

**I Peter 3:13** Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

After all if you do good, won't you receive good in return? It's just the cynics who say no good deed goes unpunished. The Bible affirms a gentle answer turns away wrath, and those who give receive, and if we do unto others as we would want done to us, often we receive in kind.

Kindness begets kindness, love begets love, forgiveness begets forgiveness. Good fruit comes from a good tree. And of all people Christian should do good, they should be the ones who are zealous for good. We should be the ones who outdo all the do-gooders.

But Peter isn't naïve, he has been around, he is a realist. He answers his question with a but. The truth is sometimes we will suffer even for doing good, for acts of righteousness.

Christians in the first century were losing their jobs, their property, they were facing exile and prison, beatings and even death, just for being Christ followers.

Has that happened to you? Have you done something nice and decent and had it backfire on you? Have you meant to bless someone and had turn into a cause for taking offense? Or have you been mocked or shunned because you wouldn't participate in something immoral?

It happens a lot. It happens to Christian high school students every day, it happens in the work place. It has been happening for thousands of years. It happened to Jesus when He was on earth and it happens to Him every day since He has been in heaven.

This is the reality we need to prepare for. The more immorality and corruption and deceit and darkness rule a culture the more it will oppose and even oppress what is good and true and right.

**Psalm 34:19** Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

Peter says, have patience, *you will be blessed*. Really, Peter? Can you really mean that, we will be blessed? That sounds like a stretch. How does he know that? Remember his quote from Psalm 34 last week.

**I Peter 3:12** For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.

We read in Acts 5 of Peter's firsthand experience of suffering for doing good, for preaching. After he and the other apostles were beaten:

**Acts 5:41** They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

They counted it a privilege to suffer for the sake of Christ.

**I Peter 4:14** If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

I know it's counterintuitive, I know it works against our fleshly nature, but don't trust your flesh, trust the Spirit. Believe God and take Him at His Word. The trials and miseries of the godly will be turned to blessing when they suffer with patience and bear the burden graciously, and continue to return good for evil.

You middle school and high school kids face these issues all the time, pressured to compromise, pressured to do things and not tell mom or dad. Friends, a boyfriend, people at parties, the crowd, you want to fit in or go along, you don't want to be on the outside. It's hard, but listen to the truth that Peter gives. Remember Jesus who suffered for you and consider being counted worth of suffering for His name.

***What does suffering for righteousness sake mean?***

***What is righteousness?*** It has to do with how we conduct ourselves with others, our behavior, both our attitude and actions; doing what is good and right. It relates to business dealings, legal matters, church or school interactions, dealings with friends, neighbors and strangers.

It's the opposite of wickedness or compromise, selfishness and self-centeredness.

This righteousness is possible only by the inner renewing work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of righteousness. Look to Jesus who suffered for doing righteousness.

***What does suffering for righteousness mean?*** It means experiencing some criticism or accusation or some loss or disadvantage for doing good or defending some good thing. It means suffering injustice or unkindness or harassment or bullying in return.

Peter says ***face this fear fearlessly.***

Fear is a sign of not trusting God will see and answer and help and bless. This is our natural response and the best defense is to turn to God, to trust Him, to wait for His help and rely on God's power.

Don't credit people with having more power than they really do, certainly not more power than God. Remember we are God's children and our salvation is kept secure in heaven. He is our refuge and strength.

Scripture again and again calls us away from trusting human ways and looking to God's ways.

**Proverbs 3:5-8** Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.

6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

8 It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

Fight fear with faith in Christ. When Christ reigns in our hearts there is no room for fear.

## **Turn fear into opportunity.**

Peter next makes a remarkable point. Peter tells us to be ready, be prepared for when we are asked about our faith and hope, about our peace and love, to not be reluctant or afraid to speak. Peter strengthens our hands here and helps us find our voice.

He isn't saying we should have answers for every point of doctrine or text of Scripture, but to have a simple, plain, clear reason for why we worship God and have faith in Jesus.

***How can you prepare?*** How can you be ready? Peter actually just said how, by regarding Christ Jesus as holy in our hearts. By reverencing Christ, by thinking much of Christ. The more we fear Christ the less we will fear man. The way we fear Him is by regarding Him as holy. Christ is the source of our hope and faith, Christ is why we are hopeful, so deepen the source.

Setting our mind on Christ and His promises will cast out the fear of man, the fear of suffering, fear of losing friends or a promotion, the fear of anything.

This hope will make it easier to give the reason for the hope that is in you. Christians who don't have much hope fall back to trying to share doctrine and do's and don'ts. Arguing points of theology is not giving a reason for the hope that is in you.

One of my most vivid memories as a new Christian in high school was standing in the driveway of a friend in Wichita, Kansas trying to come up with good answers to her objections to Christianity, like "what about all those innocent people in Africa who have never heard about Jesus, does God send them to hell?" I didn't have good answers, but most of all I didn't realize that her question was smoke screen to keep me from the real issue, which was her own heart. I didn't know how to talk about the hope I had of Christ's forgiveness and redemption and promise of eternal life. I didn't know how to gently nudge her to look at her own fears and doubts and hopelessness.

***People want hope*** and if they see it in you even when you aren't being treated well, they will start to wonder and want to know why you are different.

We live in a culture bombarded with doubt, with many causes for fear and anxiety. People want hope and you have it. God will find ways of arranging those meetings. Be prepared.

We are not like those who have no hope. Many of you in a time of a crisis have said you don't know how someone without faith could go through this. That's an expression of how important the hope that is in you is to you.

What will the world think of our faith if when they inquire, they get only silence? It is our calling as Christians to be salt in a decaying world, light in a dark world.

There has to be something in our hearts in order for there to be something on our tongue. But Peter also has something to say about our tongue.

We don't have to be boisterous or belligerent, we don't have to be proud or zealous. We have truth on our side. It doesn't have to be a debate where we are trying to win an argument. It's a sharing of the hope that is in us, unapologetic, honest, real. Simply speak to your hope and trust the Holy Spirit to be the persuader.

Paul said something similar:

**Colossians 4:5-6** Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Now what if no one in the world is ever asking you anything? You might want to ask yourself if you are trying to live in such a harmless manner in this evil world that the world would never notice you. Is your light under a bushel? It's worth asking.

### **Suffering with a good conscience.**

But guess what? Even your best answer will not always win the day. Sometimes it will be answered with slander and wrath and more accusations. This shouldn't come as a shock or surprise. Satan will not cease his attack, and some hearts are truly hard.

Our faith is so counter cultural, so at odds with the mindset and mentality and lifestyle of this world that at some point evil will push against our good.

Peter reminds us again the world is watching and we never know how God will use us and what we are doing in this pagan and ungodly world.

**I Peter 2:12** Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

**I Peter 2:15** For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

**I Peter 3:15-16** do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

Sometimes there is a time lag between the good we do and the conviction that comes on an unbelieving heart.

People who patiently bear up under unjust treatment and suffering for doing good are so rare and remarkable that their lives become a powerful witness that gets the attention of an unbelieving world.

Would we be willing to suffer unjustly if we thought it would bring salvation to someone?

The last phrase by Peter in our text is sobering. If we should suffer unjustly it is not just by chance or bad fortune, but according to a divine will and purpose. God never allows anything without have a good purpose and plan.

This is meant to comfort and help us. We are under His constant protection and care. Fear not.

**Romans 8:31** If God is for us, who can be against us?

**Hebrews 13:6** The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me?

**Matthew 5:10** Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

### **Implications and Applications.**

Two events in the news this week give us yet another glimpse into the drift of our culture.

Curt Schilling, a sports analyst for ESPN, was fired Wednesday for posting on his Facebook comments critical of confused men, so called transgendered men, using women's bathrooms.

The next day world famous music icon Prince died. He is being memorized and praised as a supremely talented musician, brilliant song writer, master of over 20 instruments. Yet he is well known for pushing all the boundaries with his sexually explicit lyrics and promiscuous lifestyle.

We live in a world that never stops calling good evil and evil good. Don't become jaded, don't give up or give in, don't lose your voice. Don't be afraid of speaking a word of warning and hope to those who are caught up in the flood of unrighteousness and wickedness that surrounds us. Don't be afraid to suffer for the Gospel, to suffer reproach, to suffer being made fun of or called a prude or a religious fanatic. Remember there is an eternity coming and heaven is ruled by a holy God and a righteous Savior.

And as we call others to repentance and hope, let us not stop repenting ourselves of the ways we have compromised or turned the other way or not defended God and His truth.

**Galatians 6:7-10** Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

“The one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” Let him who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit is saying to the church today.