

## **“CLOSING COUNSEL AND BLESSINGS.”**

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

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

**Text for the Sermon: I Peter 5:10-14**

**Prayer:**

**Introduction.**

This past week was the Republican National Convention. Some of you watched and listened to some of the numerous speeches. Donald Trump wrapped it all up in his hour long acceptance speech on Thursday evening.

A number of analysts felt the tone was dark and pessimistic perhaps summed up with the words, “things are worse than ever and I’m going to make things better than ever.”

He capitalized on the headlines of just the past month or so which are making Americans feel anxious, vulnerable, and powerless. Things really do seem to be spiraling out of control and worse than ever, there do seem to be forces out there over which we have no control.

There is so much in the news about terrorism, racial tensions, senseless shootings, military coups, deadly viruses and on and on. It seems like we don’t even have time to finish grieving one tragedy and the next one is on us.

On Thursday night Donald Trump offered a remedy. He promised to solve all our problems and make America safe and strong and prosperous again.

Our text in I Peter is a timely challenge to what Donald Trump implied in his speech, that things are getting worse and that he is going to save us.

**After you have suffered a little while.**

“After you have suffered a little while.” Why did Peter have to say it that way? Why do we have to suffer? Why does he make it sound like a given? Why not say, “if some of you, or maybe some people might”?

Suffering has been a key theme in Peter’s letter to Christians scattered across Asia Minor living under the tyranny of Rome. He reminded us in 4:12 to not be surprised by it. On that text I preached a sermon titled, “The Myth of Problem-Free Christianity.” Jesus said, “In this life you will have affliction.”

Things are not all of a sudden getting worse in our world. The world is no more or less fallen today than it was a year ago or a century ago. Compared to what Joseph Stalin, Adolph Hitler and Pol Pot did, Isis is child's play.

My point is that every generation in every age has faced terrible injustices and afflictions, sometimes natural disasters, sometimes plagues, sometimes wars, sometimes persecutions.

Since Adam and Eve were exiled from their paradise home and Cain killed Abel, life has been hard, brutally hard sometimes. Pain and heartache and losses and death have been mankind's constant companion.

No politician can save us or spare us from the harsh realities of this fallen existence. No politician can promise us a safe, secure, prosperous, easy life.

In the 1928 presidential campaign Herbert Hoover promised a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage. His promise of prosperity was derailed seven months after he took office by the stock market crash of 1929.

Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton are not our saviors, and if we put our hope in them we are in for a very rude awakening.

Last week's text told us that sufferings are being experienced by our brothers and sisters all throughout the world. Suffering just reminds us of how terrible and destructive sin is. Sin is the cause of all suffering, and when you consider how much suffering there is in the world you start to get an honest picture of how horrible sin is.

Once you see that, you start to see how desperate our need of a savior is. And once you see that, you can open your eyes to how great and good and kind and gracious God is that He has actually sent us a Savior and a Redeemer, a rescuer from sin and all the suffering that has resulted.

After we have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace.

***Suffering always precedes grace and glory.***

Consider what we have learned in I Peter.

**I Peter 1:6-7** ... for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith ... may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

**I Peter 2:21, 24** ... Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ... 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

His suffering lead to His glory and our blessing.

**I Peter 3:18** Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

Suffering and then being with God in glory.

**I Peter 4:12-13** Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

**I Peter 5:10** After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Peter leaves “a little while” intentionally vague, it may refer to our whole earthly life.

### **The God of all grace.**

In this life because of sin we will suffer, but no matter how difficult this life is, be confident in the God of all grace. Peter grounds our confidence in *four strong verbs*. The God of all grace ... will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you (ESV).

God Himself will personally see to this, He will restore, He will confirm, He will strengthen, He will establish.

These four future tense verbs rise to a crescendo, out of the dust and ashes, out of the pain and brokenness, out of the hurt and heartache, God will raise us up and set us on a firm, unshakeable foundation which is Christ.

We don't have to carefully delineate separate meanings from each of these four verbs. Together they make one strong point. The God of all grace who has called us to eternal glory will get us there through whatever suffering lies along the way. He will deliver us into His presence by His power. God is able to deliver on what He promises.

These are promises no politician can make or keep. These are promises that only God can make and will keep. Remember this in your pain and heartache and anguish and despair and tears.

This is how Christians through the ages have endured some of the most horrific torture and pain and injustice and loss. His abundant grace will be sufficient to overcome any and all suffering experienced in this life.

He will gather us to Himself and to His glory. He will share with us what He has already shared with Christ. We will be fellow heirs with Him of grace and glory.

*To him be the dominion forever and ever.*

Peter can't help himself at this point. What else can he say in response to what he has just written? If this is the promise of God for those who suffer, it's cause for worship, so he breaks out in a doxology that reminds us that God has all power and authority, all dominion, so He is able to do all He says He will.

The God who permits suffering and trials and tests, the God who allows the devil to roar and seek to devour, is the sovereign God with a mighty hand to save.

However much evil is present in this world, however much wickedness seems to be prevailing and getting worse, however much things seem to be unfair or unjust, God rules and over rules, He reigns on high and He will restore and set right all things in the end.

When we have this perspective, when we understand how God will reward all suffering with eternal glory, it's cause for rejoicing.

Even in the face of the very worst it is possible. When Hugh Latimer and Nicolas Ridley were burned at the stake in Oxford, England for their faith in October 1555, Latimer cried out: "Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

They knew that what they were about to suffer would result in glory for God and for them. Nothing can extinguish the flame of God's purposes and God's glory.

To him be the dominion forever and ever.

**This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.**

*Exhorting and declaring.*

Peter ends his letter with a personal note, some acknowledgements, but even now he can't keep from adding exhortation and encouragement.

Peter sums up his brief letter as a combination of exhorting and declaring, a combination of moral commands grounded in doctrinal truth. Life and doctrine, doing and being.

That's a good summary of all of our Christian lives. We are called to watch our life and our doctrine closely. We are to pay attention to what we do and what we believe. The sum of our lives is our outward actions and our inward thoughts. The Christian life is about what we believe and what we do based on those beliefs.

Consider all that Peter has exhorted us to do and declared to us to be true. Consider the Gospel of grace that he has preached and written. Consider the testimony Peter has given of the grace of Christ that *he* has received after so great a fall from grace when he denied Jesus.

Peter knows this grace of which he writes. He who has been forgiven much knows grace. Those who know how deep their sin is, know God's grace is deeper still. Stand in this grace.

### **Among the chosen in Babylon.**

Peter began his letter by writing to the elect exiles and now signs off by sending greetings from she who is elect, chosen. This is one church sending blessing and encouragement to another church, or in this case, several churches. She who is in Babylon is the church which is in Rome.

To the suffering there is no greater blessing than the fellowship of fellow sufferers.

They say misery loves company, but maybe it is better said, misery needs company and is strengthened in the midst of it. God has put us in the church to be a fellowship of fellow sufferers on the journey of life.

We rejoice with those who rejoice, we weep with those who weep, we care for those in need. This is why Peter concludes with *two ways* for us to show our fellowship and love.

### ***Greet each other with a kiss of love, a holy kiss.***

Paul ends several of his letters with this same exhortation. He calls it a holy kiss since it is a kiss of spiritual fellowship rather than one of romantic implications. It was a customary sign of friendship. In that culture it would most likely be cheek to cheek and man to man and woman to woman.

Today it is more like our hug than our handshake. You can shake hands with a person you don't really like or care about, but a hug implies closer fellowship and care.

This messes with our Dutch reserve but there is something to be said for a kind of church that hugs and kisses, that has a way of showing its unity and love and close fellowship in an outward and demonstrative way.

Peter began in chapter one, "love one another deeply, from the heart" and later, "love covers a multitude of sins." May there be in our midst real, genuine expressions of love, interest, care.

### ***Peace to all of you who are in Christ.***

This is a good final word to people living in troubling times. Life is hard and stressful, filled with many pressures. People who are in the midst of great trials need the fellowship of

believers and they need those believers to show love and hold up their flagging faith and speak the peace of Christ into their lives. Our peace and hope will not be found in governments or elections but in Christ and in Christ alone. His perfect peace is rest for our souls.

### **Implications and applications.**

In the Christian life, glory always follows suffering. It was true for Jesus and it is true for all the followers of Jesus. If we know the fellowship of His suffering, we will know the fellowship of His glory.

No amount of suffering trumps the eternal weight of glory that will be ours.

**Romans 8:18** I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, keep your eyes fixed on the future glory that is yet to come and is coming soon. Keep your eyes fixed on the God of all grace.

This is the key to enduring present suffering. This is the key to standing firm in God's present grace. God has loved you from before the foundations of the earth. Stand firm in His grace that you may know His peace and dwell in His eternal glory.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, thank you for rescuing and redeeming Peter and for inspiring him to write this wonderful letter full of exhortation and encouragement for Christians on the path of suffering, who walk through the valley of death's shadow. Enable us by your power and grace to finish the race well. In our trials, grant us patience, in our suffering grant us joy, in any persecution, your peace. May we share in Christ's suffering in a manner worthy of Him, for His sake and to our eternal glory. Amen.