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Christ the King Lutheran Church – Cody, WY
Lent IV – Midweek
March 22, 2023
Text: I Peter 4:1–19

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The topic for today’s sermon is probably one that all of us would rather avoid. Suffering. The Bible says a good deal about the role and place of suffering in the world and in the Christian Church. The apostle Peter had to deal with this topic because the Jewish Christians in Asia Minor were suffering because of their faith in Jesus. We don’t know the particulars of their circumstances. They were exiles from the Promised Land of Israel. It’s possible many of these Christians were slaves. Almost certainly they had no legal rights in the Roman Empire. Their religion was new, unknown to the Romans, and despised by the Jews who considered them apostates. Decades later, we know Christians were blamed for everything from natural disasters to economic downturns. They were very vulnerable and had little hope of much legal and political protection. They suffered as Christians for Christ. Likewise, every Christian, including each of us, must be prepared to suffer *as a Christian!*

I don’t listen to much Christian radio and watch television anymore. But I don’t remember hearing much about suffering. Nor have I seen many books about the redemptive good of suffering. But that’s I Peter 4 is all about, the redemptive good of suffering. The chapter begins with this encouragement, “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking...” (vs. 1). Let’s arm ourselves with God’s Word.

The first three chapters of I Peter laid the groundwork for understanding more deeply the significance of the suffering these early Christians were facing. In chapter 1, Peter reminded them that they were born again through the living and abiding word of God unto an inheritance that is imperishable,

undefiled, unfading, and kept in heaven. In chapter 2, Peter taught that they and all Christians have been called out of darkness to live in God's marvelous light. They are now the true people of God who declare the excellencies of the Lord. Chapter 3 was a wonderful exhortation teaching us how we are to live our lives as Christians at home (husbands and wives), at work (servants and masters), and in Church (those who have been saved through baptism).

Tonight, the apostle Peter instructs us how we live out the first three chapters while at the same time, endure suffering *as a Christian*. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter teaches Christians 1) that they should expect sufferings in this life and 2) that by faith, we know they will work for our eternal good. Sadly, some Christians do not heed Peter's instruction and think that suffering and hardship means they are failures in their Christian faith. Nothing could be further from the truth.

And our pleasure-crazed culture doesn't help us either. We are taught in so many different ways that pain and suffering are to be avoided. One indication of this is the continued growth in the legalization of euthanasia in our county. At present, 10 states have some form of legal, medically assisted suicide. Much of Europe and all of Canada, and Japan have legalized its practice. This phenomenon and the ever-increasing demand for stronger pain-relieving medications signals that suffering is an evil which should be avoided at all cost, even if that means purposely shortening your life.

But not so among Christians. The coming of God's Son into this world changed everything. Jesus did not have sin, original or actual. And yet, He opened the way to eternal life through means of His suffering and death. "By His wounds you have been healed" writes Peter (2:24). The greatest good – the concrete revelation of God's love and the actual salvation of the world – came through our Lord's suffering and death. His suffering redeems our suffering! His death transforms our death from ultimate defeat to the means by which we are ushered into God's holy presence. His resurrection is the promise that we too will be raised from the dead on the Last Day.

All this is to say, suffering is not an aberration for us Christians; it is part and parcel for life in Christ's Church. The apostle Peter wrote, "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." (vs. 12). In other words, we Christians should expect to walk in the same path and manner as our dear Lord and Savior. 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." As we participate in Christ's suffering, so we are promised that we will be full participants in the glory of His resurrection victory on the Last Day!

And so Peter began this chapter with this admonition and encouragement, "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of this time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God" (vs. 1-2). In other words, prepare yourselves for suffering. To do this, Peter wrote, "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins..." (vs. 7-8).

We arm ourselves with the same way of thinking that Christ had. Self-control and sober-mindedness lest our prayers are hindered. And the most important thing of all, is love. Love for God and love for one another. As we have been forgiven by God's love in Christ so we seek to love one another by forgiving each other's sins and trespasses. We follow the same path as Jesus. He gave of Himself to help the helpless, to defend the defenseless, to love the loveless, to forgive the unforgiveable, to suffer for the suffering, and to die for the dying. The mind of Jesus is to think of others first. "So as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God" (vs. 2).

Suffering will come. Peter therefore wrote, "Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is

revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (vs. 13–14). Christ died for the sins of the world upon the cross. His suffering, death, and resurrection atoned for everyone sins, including our own. Our suffering never atones for or pays for our sins. Only Jesus could do that; only Jesus did that.

When we suffer *as Christians*, we do so for the truth, for doing good in our private and public vocations, for living virtuous lives of faith and obedience, for being baptized children of God. Peter writes, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers *as a Christian*, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name” (vs. 15–16). When such afflictions come, you are being treated just like Jesus. Blessed are you because “the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (vs. 14). Therein lies our ability to rejoice in suffering and see it as a redemptive good. It is but one signal that we are participants in the life of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is making us holy, and the glory of God the Father rests upon us.

We do not seek suffering. That will come as the Lord wills it. But when it does come to us or to those we love, God’s Word provides us with the way to understand and experience it rightly. “Let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (vs. 19).

Dear saints of God, trust God’s Word and His divine promises. Do not grow weary in doing good for our God is faithful and good. As Jesus lived, suffered, died, and rose from the dead to eternal glory, so you too will live, suffer, die, and rise again unto eternal life and blessedness. Everything – and I mean everything – in your life serves for your eternal good. Blessed are you, dear people of God.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.