

**Easter 7 (B)**

*1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11*

*“And 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.”*

*“The whole world is playing hurt. Some may hurt more than others, but we all hurt.” [Yancey, *Why Do Bad Things Happen?*]*

### **Introduction**

When in trouble, what is your first impulse?

Consider Mark Ashton-Smith, a once 33-year-old lecturer at Cambridge University, who while kayaking in S. England off the Isle of Wright, capsized in treacherous waters. Clinging to his craft, with cell phone in hand, Smith’s first inclination was to call his father. It didn’t matter to him that his dad was over 3,500 miles away, training British troops in Dubai. Where, without delay, the father relayed his son’s mayday to the Coast Guard, whose station miraculously happened to be less than a mile away. Within minutes, a helicopter was on scene and plucked Smith to safety. [Reuters News Agency, *MPI*, p. 213]

So when suffering, what is our first impulse?

The child of God does no less, we call upon our heavenly Father, seeking His help. We turn to His Word and to the precious Sacraments for strength. We lean upon the bosom of our Good Shepherd for comfort. We call upon the Holy Spirit for life.

**Main Thought:** In the midst of suffering, God will “*restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish*” His you.

*“To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

Amen.

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Suffering, once again, is on the mind of Peter – and on the minds of those to whom he is writing. Where, if some of the early writers of the faith are correct, many suffered for nothing more than being “Christian.”

That was why in the early second century, “Justin Martyr wrote his *Second Apology* ... protesting the execution of three persons merely because they bore the name Christian rather than because of any illegal or immoral conduct. In the late second century, Athenagoras wrote an apology addressed to Marcus Aurelius which he asked ‘Why is a mere name odious to you? Names are not deserving of hatred; it is the unjust act that calls for penalty and punishment.’ Tertullian, too, made a similar protest in his typically memorable fashion, ‘No name of a crime stands against us, but only the crime of a name.’ He went on to ask, ‘What crime, what offense, what fault is there in a name?’ [Craddock, et. al. *Preaching through the Christian Year*, A, 289-290]

No doubt, the church does enough to bring dishonor to ourselves and to the name of Christ. We appear, at times, to live no different than the world, or we stand smugly in our hypocrisy, or snub our noses in judgment towards others. But other times, it’s not a matter of what we do, or not, that gets folks up in arms. Rather, it is simply that we bear the name – “Christian.”

To these Christ, Peter writes:

*4:12 Beloved [dearly loved of God], do not be surprised at the fiery trial [“trial by fire”] when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”*

Suffering – not self-inflicted, of course – should come to us as no surprise, Peter says.

*“The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold.”*  
[Proverbs 27:21]

It's like this car dealer from New Orleans who used to advertise from time to time on TV. He would boast: "I graduated from the school of hard knocks *summa cum laude*."

"In God's world 'chance' does not exist for the elect" [Romans 8:28]. [Sauer, *CPR*, 9:2, 41] "Suffering is [and will be] part and parcel of the Christian experience." [Craddock, et. al. *Preaching through the Christian Year*, A, 290]<sup>1</sup>

Even Jesus Himself said so; that if they have tried to do in the Master of the house, what makes you think the servants will get off "Scot free." [John 15:18-21; also 16:33; 17:14; Matthew 5:10-12]

*<sup>13</sup> But rejoice [exceedingly] insofar as you share [koinonia in] Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*

Here, we neither take pleasure in such distress, nor – as one early Christian sect – seek it out on purpose. Rather, as Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:16ff:

*"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."*

How or why? Because there is a witness to our ways, communicating a hope to the world – as Peter said last week – that far outweighs anything we might derive from this world. Which, of course, doesn't come from any power we can muster on our own. Rather, we endure, with a suffering that is intimately connected with Him whose name we bear.

Not unlike the Apostles in the book of Acts:

*<sup>14</sup> If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*

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<sup>1</sup> LUTHER: "God inflicts no glowing fire or heat – cross and suffering, which make you burn – on you for any other purpose than 'to prove you,' whether you also cling to His Word" [AE 30:126]

*“Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.” [Acts 5:41]*

This is where our ability to endure comes from ... Jesus, with whom we have *koinonia*, sweet fellowship and union.

*<sup>15</sup> But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. <sup>16</sup> Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian [that name first put on us at Baptism<sup>2</sup>], let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. <sup>17</sup> For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup> And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”*

Child of God, there is no need, as if embarrassed, to apologize – like so many often do – for crying. There is no need to apologize for those times in life when we feel we can’t go on and need the help of another to lean on. You are no less a Christian than you were before. Neither you, nor your faith is weak.

Yet, how blessed we are for the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, to be made manifest in our life, where there can be no joy in healing if there is no wound ... where there can be no Easter without Good Friday ... there can be no joy in the return, if Christ is not lifted out of our sight for a while.

Your wounds are holy and sacred to God because Jesus’ were, even as those wound point us to the Father, so that He might be glorified in us.

*<sup>19</sup> Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.*

Let our first impulse be to “Take It to the Lord in Prayer.”

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:19, but also every time the benediction is spoken [Numbers 6:22-27]. Tacitus calls Christians “a class hated for their abominations.” Jesus: “Holy Father, keep them in your name.” [John 17:11]

Where ... in light of this hope, we come to Peter's final admonition, a fitting end to the Easter season. To the exhortations above – to “*rejoice ... glorify God ... remain active in doing good ... all the while entrusting our very souls to our faithful Creator*” ... Peter adds a few final words ... words “deep in meaning and rich in application for all Christians of all time.”  
[*Sermon Studies on the Epistles (SSoE)*, A, 209]

First:

<sup>5:6</sup> *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time [His kairos/appointed] he may exalt you ...*

*“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”*

[James 4:10; see also Luke 1:52; 14:10; 1 Samuel 2:7]

Second:

<sup>7</sup> *Casting all your anxieties on him [“let Him be your donkey”<sup>3</sup>], because he cares for you.*

*“Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.”* [Psalm 55:22]

Third:

<sup>8</sup> *Be sober-minded; be watchful.*

Any “Gregory’s” in the house (whose name means “watchful”)? Eternal vigilance is called for here. Especially since we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against things we can’t see, things we can’t just organize into little binders and keep them at bay.

Speaking to the Pastors in Ephesus, Paul exhorted them to ...

*“Be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.”* [Acts 20:31]

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<sup>3</sup> Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Green New Testament*, 765; see Luke 19:35

Where to that congregation, and to all who conquer, Jesus says,

*“I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”* [Revelation 2:7b]

*“[For] Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*

Peter speaks from the deep well of experience here; but more from the perspective of one who was forgiven, and now strengthened. For those – for us – the devil has no claim here. For one who only pretends to be a lion, is no match for the real Lion of the Tribe of Judah! Only in Him is forgiveness when we fail. Only in Him is the faith to stand. Only in Him may we ...

*<sup>9</sup> Resist him, firm [“unbending, resolute”] in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*

Child of God, we are never alone in our struggles. “Christians are all in this together ... *really!*” This is no empty platitude.

Wherein, “The whole world,” says one commentary, “is the devil’s ‘stomping ground,’ and thus we might expect him to be active where we go. But Christ is not only everywhere – he is almighty.” [SSoE, 211]

Yes, we are not left to our own devices. “One little word can fell him.” God’s Word and the fellowship of our B.A.S.I.C. are our shield and our defense. They are our cover and rear guard!

Wherein, these last four postures to which God calls us to take are, in turn, matched by four actions which ...

*<sup>10</sup> And 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 [“perfect, knit together ... mend – as in nets”] ... confirm ... strengthen ... and establish you.”*

Where, all of God's promises are "in the future tense, which means they are a sure promise of God. There are no conditions attached to them. We have something solid to hang on to. The God of all grace and power [who has seen us thus far by faith] will guide us safely through to eternal glory. What a blessed assurance this is!" [SSoE, 211]

*<sup>11</sup> To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

### **Conclusion**

So, when in trouble, what is your first impulse?

Chuck Swindoll writes in his book, *Hope in Hurtful Times*:

"Trials are not an elective in the Christian life; they are a required course. That course is a prerequisite to Christ likeness. But sometimes the tests are so gruelingly comprehensive that our tendency is to drop that course entirely." [107]

Child of God, we will neither drop the course, nor totally withdraw, for ours forever is the call to live up, in and out.

Where our call to courage and strength is not of our own – especially in the face of our own sin, Satan's wiles, and this world's uncertainties. No, we have an ace in the hole ... "who in grace has called us to be his own, and has promised to keep us firm and steadfast." [SSoE, 212] His name is ... Jesus ... who not only sees us through, but who stands as our only effective defense.

*<sup>12</sup> By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that **this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.** <sup>13</sup> She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. <sup>14</sup> **Greet one another with the kiss of love.***

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

*And ... amen!*