

Dear Friends in Christ,

When we speak of the unjust treatment of Christians, we think of Christians in jail in Communist countries or perhaps Syrian Christians fleeing their homes or even losing their lives. This severe persecution is real and we can pray that the Lord would help those who are undergoing such severe trials. This is not the only persecution that takes place.

Speaking with my father, former Latin American Missionary Roger Sprain, he spoke about people in Colombia, SA who when they joined the Lutheran Church were persecuted by their families at home. They were harassed verbally and given the silent treatment among other things. He also mentioned that something similar happened to people on the Caribbean Island of Puerto Rico. It happens in other places. You could ask Pastor Spevacek about Africa. I believe that it happens here in our country.

Can you imagine your father or mother whom you love treating you with contempt and perhaps not speaking with you? You would be suffering every time you set foot in your family home.

I bring this up this morning because St. Peter mentions the unjust treatment of slaves in 1 Peter, chapter 2. We don't have household slavery among us, however these slaves were being treated unjustly because of their Christian faith. What Peter tells them is important because we can be treated unfairly for our faith in the risen Jesus. St. Peter calls on us today to: **Do Good even in Suffering! Jesus is Your Savior Shepherd.**

### **1. Jesus wants you to do good.**

It was the Apostle Peter who asked Jesus, **“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”** (Matthew 18:20-22) Unjust suffering was on the minds of Jesus' followers. Jesus answers Peter, **“Seventy times seven.”** Peter got the message and he passes it onto us. Jesus wants us to do good.

A. Peter tells us in his letter that we are to bear up under unjust suffering because we are conscious of God.

Someone who does not know God may bear up under suffering because they feel they have no choice or because they feel they can gain something.

*“If I put up with this for now, I can really stick it to them and get revenge later.”* This is not what the believing Christian does.

We bear up under suffering because he says, **“We are conscious of God.”** Our trust is in God who has called us not to sin, but to do good. Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, **“But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”** (Matthew 5:44)

B. Jesus wants us to do good and there is no good in sinning. Peter says in verse 20, **“But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?”** If the slave was mad at his master he could ignore what he was told or take forever to accomplish the task. However, if caught, the slave would be beaten. Then it was not unjust suffering, but a beating that was deserved. If a boss is harsh or mean to us because we are a Christian, we should endure it. If a relative in the family is harsh or mean because we are a Christian, we are to endure it. The same would be true with a neighbor. If we get mad and sin against them, then any suffering is our own fault.

C. Peter tells us suffering and doing good is commendable before God. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, **“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”** (Matthew 5:11-12) If we sin God gives us a call to repentance and the threat of punishment.

## **2. Jesus is our pattern.**

Peter tells us that Jesus is our pattern for bearing up under suffering. In verse 21 he writes, **“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”** Remember Jesus’ call in Matthew 16, **“Take up your cross and follow me.”** We follow in Jesus’ footsteps as a little boy or girl stepping in their father’s footprints in the snow or in the soil. (*Sermon’s ILCW A -Epistles, p.185*)

A. Peter shows us Jesus suffered and did not do wrong. He quotes from Isaiah, **“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”** [vs. 22 & Isaiah 53:9]

1. I can imagine that when people faced the prospect of suffering and especially crucifixion, that they said anything, even lied to get out of it. Jesus, even though he was innocent was silent like a sheep before his

shearers. In fact Jesus prayed that his enemies would be forgiven. (Luke 23:34) Jesus was perfect in suffering.

2. Jesus had to be for you and me. He didn't hurl insults. He didn't retaliate. He didn't make threats. (23) He did this because it was the right thing to do. He did because when we suffer, we insult others, even if it is just in our mind. We retaliate. We threaten. We sin. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, took our place and our punishment on Good Friday so that we would have perfect forgiveness.

B. Someone might say, but it isn't fair. The wicked get away with so much! The author of Psalm 73 agrees until he looked at God and remembered who he is. God promises to bring justice and punishment to the wicked. God promises to bring relief and finally safety for us, even if we die a martyr's death and that safety is heaven. Jesus knew this and he completely trusted his heavenly Father to deliver him and he did. This is how we bear up under unjust suffering. To reinforce this Peter adds a comforting picture.

### **3. Jesus is our Shepherd.**

Jesus is more than a pattern or example to follow. Jesus is our Shepherd.

A. Peter doesn't want us to forget Jesus' role as our Savior.

1. He writes, **“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross.**” (24) When Peter says, **“Our sins”** he may be remembering that he retaliated for Jesus by cutting off a man's ear. Jesus bore Peter's sins and our sins on the cross. St. Paul tells us in Galatians, **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”** (Gal 3:13) The Shepherd lay down his life for the sheep.

2. The reason he did this St. Peter tells us is, **so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.”** (Isaiah 53:4-6) When thoughts of revenge flare up in our heart, we remember God says this is wrong and we think of Jesus and his saving love. We love Jesus now more than we love revenge. So we bear up under unjust suffering and in doing so we live for righteousness.

The word for “wounds” used here refers to welts and bruises. Slaves received welts and bruises when they were beaten. What a powerful picture! When they received welts and bruises, they were to remember Jesus' welt's and bruises which had changed their lives. So you and I when we are wounded by someone, may quickly think of revenge. We should turn our

thoughts to the wounds of Jesus. His love will move us to love, even our enemies.

B. Peter adds another picture of the love of Christ. He is our Shepherd.

**For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (25)**

Without Jesus we are lost and without direction in this life. That is how we once were. Now God’s plan of salvation has returned us to our Shepherd and Overseer. A shepherd keeps a close eye on his sheep. They can easily wander off and get into trouble and danger. Jesus keeps a close eye on us. He is always with us and guiding our lives. When we have to make decisions on how to handle a situation where someone is hurting us, he guides us in his word. We are never lost or without direction when Jesus is in the picture.

2. Remember it says in Psalm 23, He leads us to the **“green pastures and quiet waters.”** (1) That is leads us to Word and Sacrament. He protects our souls and makes us strong. When suffering comes, we manage it. We are comforted with the promise that he will bring us to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23:6)

Conclusion: The new stained glass window over the altar is wonderful. A member told me, *“I could come any time and just sit and stare at it.”* I believe that is because it is reflecting the comfort that Scripture gives.

We may not always appreciate it as much when we feel strong and things are going well. However, when you are hit with life’s difficulties, including unjust treatment, you need comfort. The window reflects 1 Peter 2 and Psalm 23 and other Scriptures. That is why it is so comforting. The Lord calls on us to do good at all times, even in unjust suffering. We can do so because our Savior and Shepherd has taken care of our salvation and is taking care of us today. Amen.