

The Third Sunday of Easter

1 Peter 2:21-25: "We Follow in the Steps of the Shepherd."

April 25/26, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd of the sheep, who came to seek the lost and to gather them into Your fold: Have compassion on those who have wandered from You; feed those who hunger, cause the weary to lie down in Your pastures, bind up those who are broken in heart, and strengthen those who are weak; and lead us all, O Lord, in the paths of righteousness, for Your name's sake. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 87)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the second chapter of St. Peter's First Epistle, beginning with the twenty-first verse:

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. "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth." When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. 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." For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who protects His sheep and guides them through the difficulties of this life, so they are safely brought to the peace and joy of heaven, dear fellow redeemed:

It feels good to do good things for a neighbor. We are glad to lend a helping hand, to make a burden lighter, to be a blessing in someone's day. But I'm sure you can think of times when you tried to do good for others, and they did not appreciate your efforts. They may have even blamed you for the very problems you were trying to help them with! That hurts. It can make you feel like a failure. If you dwell on it enough, it can also make you bitter and angry at the person who rejected your good intentions and good deeds.

The apostle Peter writes about situations like this in the verses just before today's text. He said that when you suffer for doing good and you endure the suffering by faith in Jesus, "this is a gracious thing in the sight of God" (2:20). He does not tell us to seek revenge, to inflict the same pain on others that they have inflicted on us. He tells us to patiently endure suffering with our eyes fixed on Jesus.

We look to Jesus who through His suffering "[left] us an example, so that [we] might follow in His steps." Sometimes we suffer because of wrong choices we make or bad things we do. So if we are caught stealing something and are sent to jail, or if we purposely harm someone and they

retaliate, that is suffering we bring on ourselves. Jesus did not suffer for things like this, because He never did anything wrong.

That is why He is such a powerful example for us. He only did good things for people. He only did what was helpful and noble and right. It seems like that should have caused everyone to love Him and have great respect for Him. But not all appreciated His goodness, such as a number of the scribes and Pharisees. Their standard of righteousness was different than God's, and they did not think Jesus measured up. They charged Him with violating the holy law. They even accused Him of being an agent of Satan and having a demon.

These attacks gained a fresh intensity and violence during Holy Week. After He was arrested, Jesus endured physical and verbal abuse from the religious leaders and the Roman soldiers. They could not charge Him with a wrong, but they were glad to see Him suffer. He could have responded by unleashing the mighty angels against His attackers. He could have taken them all on by Himself, and not one would have been left standing.

But He did not do this. Peter writes that Jesus did not revile those who reviled Him. He would not stoop to their level. Nor did He threaten while He suffered. He took the suffering quietly, not lifting His voice or even opening His mouth much at all. Instead He *"continued entrusting Himself"* to His heavenly Father — *"to Him who judges justly."*

This is the pattern to follow while we suffer. Our impulse is to hurt those who hurt us, whether they are family members, co-workers, or others in the community. Isn't that how we dealt with our siblings in our younger years? "If you hit me, I'll hit you." "If you take something from me, I'll take something from you." It's not that we should forego justice and let everyone walk all over us. But we should not take revenge into our own hands. Instead we entrust ourselves to *"Him who judges justly,"* like Jesus did.

But why should we behave in this way? Why should we let people off the hook and deny our own sense of justice? Why should we try to be like Jesus, as if that were even possible? Those are fair questions. It is true that we can hardly be compared with Jesus. We are nowhere near as good. We cannot come close to His level of righteousness. Even the best things we do are tainted by sin.

The reason we try, the reason we want to do better, is because of what Jesus did for us. Today's text says that *"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree."* This is why Jesus willingly and patiently suffered. It was to save you. It was to make atonement for all your sins. God had every right to hold your sins against you. His law is perfect, and you broke each one of the Commandments. But God the Father held these transgressions against His Son. Jesus endured God's righteous anger for your sins, so you would be spared.

He suffered for every harsh or unkind word you have spoken and for every act of revenge you carried out in your anger. He suffered for all the times you took justice into your own hands and did not trust the Lord to do it. Jesus did this so that sin would neither define you nor overcome you. The blood He shed wipes your slate clean. His blood also cleanses you from the sins others have committed against you. He was reviled, attacked, and abused, so you could find relief in Him when you are wronged. *"By His wounds you have been healed."*

Jesus suffered and died to give you a new life. He took your sins on Himself, so you could live in His righteousness. Because His righteousness is yours, you are free to do good for your neighbor without the need to be recognized, appreciated, or thanked. Those friendly responses are encouraging things that make us feel better about our service. But the Lord calls us to do good for the sake of good, to be kind for the sake of kindness, to show love for the sake of love. We do for others as Jesus did for us, freely and joyfully, no matter how our efforts are received.

But isn't there a point when "enough is enough"? Peter wondered this. He asked Jesus, "*Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?*" That sounds reasonable. Many people won't even forgive once—seven times is pretty generous! Jesus said to him, "*I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven*" (Mat. 18:21,22). He told Peter that our love for others should have no limit.

That is hard for us, and the Lord understands our struggle. That is why He not only comforts us when our love is rejected, He also strengthens us to carry on. He works these things in us through His means of grace, through His powerful Word and Sacraments. These are the "*green pastures*" and "*still waters*" where we find rest and restoration. This is where our Good Shepherd leads us and feeds us.

You and I have felt the hunger of having to go without this spiritual nourishment in regular divine services. We have had to be content with hearing the Word in our living rooms. We long to come together again to receive the Lord's Supper and to encourage and be encouraged by our fellow congregation members. If we took these things for granted before, we don't take them for granted as much now.

But even though our spiritual routine has been interrupted, our Good Shepherd continues to care for His sheep. He meets you in your home whenever you read and meditate on His Word. Through the Word, He leads you to daily repent of your sin and to return to His "*paths of righteousness.*" Even if you are quarantined in your home right now, the Lord is with you. He will not abandon you, His sheep.

Today's text says, "*For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*" You and I have often strayed into sin and given in to our worst impulses. But again and again God turns us back to His grace. Jesus is the *Shepherd and Overseer of [our] souls.*" Like a shepherd who won't leave even one little lamb behind, Jesus does not want to lose one soul for heaven.

He is totally committed to saving you from the eternal destruction that so many bring upon themselves. They are destroyed because they reject His salvation. Maybe they chose the pleasures of the world over the promises of His Word. Or they did not believe they needed saving. Or they thought it was up to them to get themselves to heaven by their own efforts.

Jesus is "the Shepherd of souls." He and only He can save. It is only by His work that a soul can enter heaven. If a shepherd told a lamb to go from here to another place 100 miles away where it had never been, the lamb could not do it. How could it know the way? Jesus does not tell us

to find our way to heaven on our own. He leads us there. By Baptism, He brings us through His death and resurrection and continues to apply His grace to us through Word and Sacrament.

By continuing to listen to His Voice, **We Follow in the Steps of the Shepherd.** His Word strengthens our faith in Him and strengthens our love for each other. His Word guides us through the good times and the bad. His Word keeps our soul safely in His care and comforts us on our journey. Our Good Shepherd is with us “all the way,” as the hymnwriter says it so well:

I walk with Jesus all the way;
His guidance never fails me.
Within His wounds I find a stay
When Satan’s pow’r assails me,
And, by His footsteps led,
My path I safely tread.
In spite of ills that threaten may,
I walk with Jesus all the way.
(*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* #252, v. 5)

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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