

050320 1 Peter 2:19-25 Hope in Your Suffering

Hope in your suffering – do you know the value of hope in suffering? How many of you have ever craved a stronger, deeper sense of hope in your suffering?

Our sermons, in these weeks after Easter, are exploring the Bible book of First Peter. The apostle Peter wrote two letters that are included in the New Testament. This first letter addresses many different topics, but First Peter focuses especially on the topic of suffering. Peter was writing to Christian churches in Asia Minor back in the first century. Christians were being persecuted, singled out, even killed for following in the way of Jesus Christ. Peter's letter offers hope to the suffering. Hope is something very precious, a blessing that's incredibly helpful in this world of struggles. But, for those who are suffering, really suffering, hope is absolutely essential.

Some of you know a thing or two about suffering. Some of you know first-hand what it is to live with misery, to endure pain, to go through unjust, undeserved, unspeakably hard times. Some of you are going through family troubles, chronic illness, terminal disease, grief, financial distress, abuse, addiction, tragedy. Suffering takes so many forms in our lives.

So these words of Peter, in this letter, may have special meaning and value for many of you. I encourage you to read this little letter through a couple of times. It's only five chapters. Pay special attention to the verses that speak of suffering.

Some of what Peter writes here may not be directly applicable to the kinds of suffering you've experienced. Peter talks a lot about suffering for being a Christian believer. Most of us haven't suffered that kind of religious persecution; but we can still learn about the nature of suffering from Peter's words. More importantly, we can all draw hope from these inspired words. Hope in our times of suffering. Hope in your suffering.

Now, it's nothing like being burned at the stake, or having to fight a wild lion in the Coliseum, as some of Peter's contemporaries may have had to do; but we're going through a bit of Covid-19 suffering these days, aren't we? We're cut off from each other. We're stuck at home. We're all hopefully staying healthy and safe, but our prayer list is full of those in our nation, in our state, who are sick, dying, scared, out of work, anxious, lonely, suffering. We may be OK for now, but many of us know people who are really struggling, in dangerous places, facing harsh realities, suffering.

We need hope in our suffering. We need hope to convey to those who around us who are suffering. We need that deep, powerful, lively sense of hope in our hearts these days, don't we?

Well, let's find it. You can't come here to Hope today. Hope Lutheran Church isn't open yet. Hopefully soon, right? But you can find hope today in the Word of God. You can always find hope in the Word of God.

Today we **zoom in** on First Peter 2:19-25. In the verses of our Epistle Lesson, Peter is encouraging those first-century Christians to hang in there, to take a different view of their suffering. He **says**, **"... if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God."** That's a challenging thought, isn't it? Suffering isn't a totally bad thing, Peter says. It can actually be a "gracious thing in the sight of God."

I Peter 2:19-25

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v. 20

My first reaction, honestly, is to say, "Thanks, but no thanks, Peter. I'll pass on the suffering. I'd much rather be past all of this pandemic suffering, and get to some of the more gracious things of God."

But look where Peter goes next with this thought. Suffering isn't a totally bad thing – why not? Peter helps us take a really crucial step. He links our suffering to Christ's suffering. Peter teaches us about finding hope in our suffering, through Christ.

He explains, about our **suffering**, **"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you,"** Peter's not negating, or downplaying, the suffering you go through. But he coaches you here to take a moment, even as you endure your suffering, to remember the way Christ suffered for you. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. The holy Son of God took all your sins to the cross. He bore all your punishment. He suffered betrayal, injustice, cruelty, physical torture, spiritual agony – all to the max degree – for you, for me.

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v. 21

Our Lord Jesus knows suffering, doesn't he, Peter nudges us. The hope we have as Christians is all because of what Jesus has done for us. We are forgiven, we are saved, we are loved by God this day not because we are anything at all, but because Christ is everything for us. There's hope for sinners like us, because Christ suffered everything for us.

But Peter offers still more hope. He **says**, **"Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you might follow in his steps."** Follow in Christ's steps. When you suffer, do what Jesus did. Try to face it and bear it the way Jesus did.

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v. 21

Verse 22: “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.” Sinning, when you’re suffering, or being deceitful, while suffering, is only going to hurt you and others. Follow in Christ’s steps.

“quote”
v. 22

Verse 23: “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.” Reviling and threatening others, when we’re suffering, is a waste of energy. But entrusting yourself to your gracious, loving God in those moments, like Jesus did, is the way to go. Follow in Christ’s steps.

“quote”
v. 23

And one more gem from Peter today, to give us hope in our **suffering**. “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.” What greater hope is there than that? Than to die to sin and live to righteousness, in this challenging, ungodly world! What greater hope could there be, than to be healed, for all time and eternity, by the great Healer himself!

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v. 24

I know there’s a whole lot **more** to say about suffering; and I know we have suffering still to face. But we have hope today in our suffering, friends, through our Lord Jesus, who suffered for us. May God give us grace and strength to follow in his steps. Amen.

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