

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

May 3, 2020

Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church

## **Images of the Savior: The Shepherd and Overseer**

Last week Peter showed us an image of our Savior as the Lamb. Jesus was the Lamb without blemish or defect who suffered in order to defend us in God's impartial courtroom. Today, Peter shows us Jesus as the one who cares for the lambs. Christ is the Shepherd and Overseer.

### **1 Peter 2:19–25 (NIV84)**

*For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. <sup>20</sup> But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. <sup>21</sup> To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." <sup>23</sup> When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

These verses from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter are in the middle of a section on how a Christian is to live in this world. Before our text for today, Peter has given instructions on how Christians live under a secular government. "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men... <sup>15</sup> For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men." (1 Peter 2:13-15). Christians are to be witnesses of Christ to the world by submitting to the governing authorities, not by rebelling against them. Of course, much more could be said about that topic but that is not our focus today.

In the verses following the text for today, Peter encourages Christian living in marriage. "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, <sup>2</sup> when they see the purity and reverence of your lives." (1 Peter 3:1-2). The goal of a Christian woman married to an unbelieving husband is to win them to the faith with purity and reverence, not with nagging and threats.

The verses before us today have the same theme. Christians are to live such good lives in this world that those around them have no basis for a charge against them, no reason to be angry with them. But instead, that unbelievers may look at our good lives and ask about Jesus. In the verses for today, Peter addresses a group of people for whom this might be especially difficult. He addresses slaves.

At this time and place in history, a significant portion of the population was in slavery of some kind. And slavery was not limited to people from a certain area or country or ethnic group. People from many different places were slaves. Some of these slaves had heard the message of Christ and believed that Christ died and rose for them. But though they were not free from sin and death, they were living in less than ideal conditions. How were they to live as Christians who were owned by another human, especially if that human master was cruel?

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And in our sinful nature would like to tell Peter he is wrong. You don't just endure the suffering. You fight back. You run away. You organize a sit in or work stoppage. You sabotage the master's business. You do your assigned tasks at half speed. You certainly would not reward a cruel master with your faithful service.

The slaves Peter addresses did not have the option to apply for a job down the street. They were slaves. Thankfully, slavery is outlawed by most nations today. But you may have been in a similar situation with a job. Of course, you can in good conscience apply for a different job if you are being mistreated. But what do you do while you are still under a cruel boss or unfair working conditions?

Peter's advice, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is to bear up under unjust suffering. This is the opposite of what we want to do. We want to retaliate. We want to harm those who harm us. We want to give only half an effort when we don't feel we are appreciated. Why should we work faithfully for someone who mistreats us? Our sinful nature cannot see how suffering is commendable before God.

The only way we can endure the pain of unjust suffering is by being conscious of God. We must be aware of God and specifically aware of our Good Shepherd. Looking at Jesus, we can endure many things, even following in his footsteps of suffering.

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We have traded insult for insult. Our Shepherd was silent when insulted. We have used deceit to avoid suffering. Our Shepherd always spoke the truth even when it would bring suffering. We threaten those who would cause us trouble verbally or physically or in our thoughts. Our Shepherd made no threats against those who beat him. We have sinned and deserve to suffer God's wrath forever in hell. Our Shepherd committed no sin and deserves to be commended by his Father for all eternity. If anyone had a right to complain about the pain he suffered, it would be Christ and not us. We should confess what one criminal confessed as he hung on a cross next to Jesus. "We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man [Christ] has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41).

Our Good Shepherd knew the task before him was to suffer and die. He took on that task willingly and fully devoted himself to rescuing sinners. In all things, Jesus entrusted himself to the Father who judges justly. And the Father judged that Jesus has paid the full price for every sin of every sinner. The Shepherd suffered willingly and gladly for sheep who love to wander. The Shepherd suffered for you. The Shepherd offered his body on the cross to pay for every sin. This is the image we must have of Christ if we are to endure suffering in any way in this world. We see Jesus as the Shepherd who gave up everything to rescue us from sin, death and the devil, who is that prowling lion seeking to devour us. But he will not because our Shepherd bore our sins in his body on the tree to forgive us and bring us to God.

Our Shepherd gives us the reason and motivation to live as Peter urges. Because he saved us from our own sins, we now follow his example and in his footsteps. Christ's footsteps led to the cross. We do not seek out suffering but all Christians will bear a cross of suffering in this world. It may come when we hold fast to all of God's Word and suffer the insults of some in this world. Suffering and shunning may come to some believers who

have left the family religion. However suffering comes to us, we deal with it following the example of Christ.

First, the suffering does not stop us from living a righteous life. Through Christ, we died to sin so that we may live for righteousness. We continue to live as God wants even if that means we might suffer.

Second, we entrust ourselves to God, who judges justly. We do not seek revenge or retaliate. We don't try to make others suffer as we suffer. God is not some cruel master who arbitrarily renders judgment. He is a just judge and we trust that he has forgiven us through Christ because he promised to forgive us through Christ. He will therefore render the correct judgment on those who oppose Christ, but that is his judgment to render and not ours.

Finally, we recognize that our suffering does not save us. Our wounds do not heal us. Christ's wounds heal us. His suffering saves us. We live such good lives in this world, not to be saved, but to thank Christ for saving us. We live so that others in this world may look at our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven. All that we do is to thank our Shepherd for all he has done for us.

Peter connects one more image to our Savior in this section. Peter calls him the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Remember that this section of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter is addressed to slaves, especially those with unjust masters. Another word for master is overseer. But what a contrast there is between a cruel human overseer who punishes unjustly and Christ, the Overseer of our souls.

Jesus as Overseer does not force us to labor for him, but graciously invites us to believe in him. Christ did not come to boss us around and get as much as he can from us. Our Overseer is concerned with our eternal souls. He came to watch over, to oversee, our souls until he brings us to heaven. He is the Shepherd who laid his life down, only to take it up again on Easter in order to redeem us. He is also the Overseer who only wants what is best for us. We can confidently live as Christians in this world no matter what may happen because of what our Shepherd and Overseer has done and will continue to do for us.

Amen.