

Introduction

Welcome to St. Peter's Lutheran Church Estevan. Pastor Kleemola here to bring you a partial service for the Fourth Sunday of Easter – May 3, 2020.

Readings for the Fourth Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Act 2:42-47
Psalm: 23
Epistle: 1 Peter 2:19-25
Gospel: John 10:1-10

Text for today's Sermon is taken from 1 Peter 2:19-25

This is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 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.

Sermon – Example...and Much More

Christ has risen! He has risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Dear friends in Christ Jesus; Who are the people held up as examples of a good and productive life in today's society and culture? Who is it that we are encouraged to emulate in our own lives? Who comes to mind? Political leaders? Perhaps not. Military heroes? How many current ones can you actually name? Sports figures? Achievers in the fields of science and technology? Accomplished artists? Entertainers?

There are problems, though, with any figure who is made a template or model for our lives. First, as we have so often discovered, those who look good in the public eye often are deeply flawed with their own moral failures. Do you really want to hold up as an example a successful business person who is convicted of embezzlement or a popular political figure whose life is marred by sexual infidelity to his wife? There are no perfect examples! Second, even with the best of examples, those men and women whose lives do appear to be wholesome and without public defect, there's a problem: they seem to set the bar so high that we can never measure up to it.

In today's text, Peter speaks of another example. One who is categorically different from any other role model or hero that you might think of within the world that we know. Peter holds up another example, but more than an example. The apostle commends to us the Good Shepherd, Christ Jesus. He is an example, but He is so much more. He is the Saviour, who suffered for our sins and was raised from death to give life to unruly and straying sheep. So today, we focus our minds and hearts on this Good Shepherd.

Martin Luther reminds us that before Jesus can be our example, He must be our Saviour. The pre-Reformation equivalent to those WWJD bracelets that were popular a few years ago was an "imitation of Christ" piety that saw the essence of faith as living as Jesus lived. Salvation would be acquired by conforming oneself to the pattern of Christ's perfect life. Over and against this approach, Luther asserted that Jesus is first of all "gift" or "sacrament," and only secondarily is He an example. Salvation by imitation would still leave us under the Law and in our sin. Luther noted that Jesus is our example not in order to attain to salvation, but in order to live as redeemed and regenerated children of God in this sinful world.

Our Good Shepherd is an example of endurance... and more. What is there to endure? Well, living as a Christian has never been a particularly easy proposition; and if it was, the likelihood is great that such a life wasn't all that Christian. Though the blessings outweigh the sufferings – in the long run at least – that does not make the Christian life a bed of roses. Peter points out in our text that you will, at times, have to endure unjust suffering. This is suffering that comes not from our sin but from the sin of others.

Now suffering is expected by those who have done wrong. Sin and suffering are common traveling companions. While the sin may seem pleasant for a time, it always results in suffering in the end. The lies are found out. The guilty are tracked down. The chickens come home to roost. Criminals have no reason to ask why punishment is coming to them. They are guilty as charged, regardless of what self-justification they may attempt.

But the suffering of which Peter speaks issues from actually doing what is good and right in the Lord's eyes. Next week's first lesson tells the story of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Although, as that reading tells us, Stephen was **"a man full of God's grace and power [and] did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people,"** (Acts 6:8) enemies told lies about him, he told the uncomfortable truth, and he, as a result, was stoned to death. He was the first, but by no means the last to suffer such a fate. All of Jesus' apostles were martyred with the exception of John whom Jesus had charged with the care of His mother. There have been lulls in persecution at various times in history, but in modern times it has intensified. More people were martyred for their faith in the 20th Century than in the nineteen previous centuries combined. Countries such as Iran, Somalia, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Sudan, Yemen, India, and many others are not safe places for Christians to live. Worldwide, eleven Christians per day are killed for the crime of being Christians. Even here, confess your faith on Facebook and watch the haters come out. We call this "cross-bearing," for it is suffering that comes from being identified as one who belongs to the crucified Lord.

Christ Jesus is not only an example of endurance, but He is the One who endured for us!

When He was insulted, ridiculed, and reviled, He endured it, knowing that this was destined to be His lot in life. He was not *of* this world, and the world rejected Him because of it. In His will to be our Saviour, He endures humiliation at the hands of sinners. Recall the Gospel accounts of His passion: betrayed by His friend, spit upon, heckled by soldiers and crowds, scourged, crowned with thorns, and even more that is not recorded. Finally, He endures the shame of the cross. He is unjustly executed as a blasphemer. The One who knew no sin is made to be sin for us. But this was all part of His Father's set plan and foreknowledge, and so His life was centered, focused on the cross, and led unswervingly to it. That is the life to which we are called when He says, **"Take up your cross and follow me."** We follow in His steps.

Our Good Shepherd is the example of forgiveness for those who do us wrong... and more.

Forgiveness of sins was His mission. He came into the world to purchase and win the forgiveness of our sins by His death and resurrection. He innocently suffers for our sins and sheds His blood in atonement for our rebellion.

Throughout His life, we see Him extending this forgiveness to sinners. Think of the paralytic whose friends let him down through the roof in front of Jesus. Jesus told him, "Son, your sins are forgiven," and when He is challenged that only God can forgive sins, He replies, "Which is easier

to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, He said to the man, 'Get up, take your mat and go home,'" and he did. (Mark 2:4-11).

Or take the woman caught in adultery. In order to catch Him in His words, the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees pointed out that Moses commanded them to stone such, and asked Jesus what He said. Jesus replied, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" – but there were no takers. Jesus did not condemn the woman, but told her to go and leave her life of sin. (Jn 8:3-11) He prays from the cross for the soldiers as they drive in the nails: **"Father, forgive them,"** (Lk 23:34) and to the thief on the cross who asked Jesus to remember him when He comes into His kingdom, He said, **"Today, you will be with me in paradise."** (Lk 23:42-43) Much more than example, Jesus also forgives *us*.

Jesus was never a victim. He willingly gave up His life for us. That's what He says when He talks about the Good Shepherd laying down His life for the sheep: **"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."** (Jn 10:17-18) Throughout His trials, He orchestrates things so ensure that He is convicted and crucified. Before the Sanhedrin He answered only one question, confessing Himself to be the Christ which makes Him guilty of blasphemy. Before Pilate He again answered only one question, confessing that He is a king, making Himself guilty of treason. No, Jesus was never a victim, nor does He make victims of those who persecute Him. He bears the sin of the world – and our individual sin – in His body.

By Jesus forgiving us, we are released from sin's power and the compulsion to use our suffering as an excuse for sinning against those who hurt us. Instead, we die to sin and live to righteousness. (Rom 6:1–11) Jesus teaches us to pray: **"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."** Our forgiving others follows His forgiving us.

Our Good Shepherd is also the example of entrusting our lives into the hands of a faithful and just judge... and more. Even on the cross, at the end of His earthly course, Jesus commends His spirit into the hands of His Father. (Lk 23:46) In death, yes, even His God-forsaken death for our sins on the cross, He clings to His Father, trusting in Him.

We follow Jesus' example with, in effect, the same prayer in Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers: "For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things."

But much more than example, Jesus is the Shepherd and Guardian into whose hands we can commend our souls. We have the sure and certain knowledge that nothing can separate us from His love and care, not even the distress of persecution, the tribulations that are inflicted on us. (Rom 8:35–39) Dying, we live with confidence in this promise! Nothing will snatch us from the hands of our Good Shepherd. What people intend for evil, God works for the good of those who trust in Him. We have His promise that our Good Shepherd who began the good work in us by calling us to faith will bring it to completion. (Phil 1:6)

Thank God that we have more than a good example in Jesus Christ! We have a Good Shepherd, who was put to death for your sins and raised again for your justification. Knowing that He has loved us with such an everlasting love, even to the point of being given over to suffer death on the cross, we can live as those who are conformed to His image. He is an example for the life of faith in the Father and love for our neighbours. But even better, He is the Shepherd who has rescued us, reconciling us to His Father, and even now by His Gospel, enlivening us to live in Him and for Him. Amen.

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Prayer of the Church

Bidden by our Shepherd, let us come before His throne of grace in prayer on behalf of all people according to their needs.

Blessed Shepherd, You established Your Church with Your sacrificial death and mighty resurrection. Grant us devotion, that we may abide in the teaching of the apostles and honour the fellowship of the Church. Guard us against all enemies of Your Word, and keep us within the care of Your flock and staff forevermore.

Mighty Shepherd, You hold in Your hands all the might of man, and You hold accountable those who would govern Your people. Grant to us good government and good leaders who will honour Your purpose, protect Your people, serve the cause of justice and defend our liberty against all threats. Give them wisdom and moderation in their pandemic response.

Loving Shepherd, You loved the world enough to shed Your blood, and You desire that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Inspire and equip Your Church and her ministers to speak Your Word faithfully and boldly, and bless all those who serve us on Your

behalf. Bless us especially when we are persecuted for the faith or suffer for the sake of the good that honours You and is obedient to Your Word.

Holy Shepherd, You have clothed us with Christ's righteousness and taught us to love all that is good, right and true. Bless all artists and artisans, composers and musicians, craftsmen and writers, that they may employ all their skills for Your glory and in service to the Gospel and that the arts may testify to Your saving death and resurrection.

Merciful Shepherd, Your wounds are our healing and Your voice calls us to You in time of need. Hear us on behalf of all those who suffer in body or mind, who grieve those whom they love, and to whom death draws near. We pray especially for Pattie Berday, Dean Euteneier, Gerald Olson, Wanda Stang, and those we name in our hearts. Grant them healing according to Your will, grace to sustain them in the day of trouble, and hope of the new and everlasting life to come. Be with the unemployed and the distraught, and return them to health and livelihood.

Gracious Shepherd, You seek out those who have fallen and restore the sinner to repentance. Send forth Your Spirit to rekindle faith in the hearts of those who have fallen away from the truth or who have been overcome by temptation and sin. Bring good from ill and increase in all the hunger for Your Word and a recognition of our need, that many may be gathered into Your flock when church doors are opened wide again.

Giving Shepherd, You have not withheld anything from us but emptied Yourself fully upon the cross that we might be saved. Move our hearts to such devotion and teach us such generosity, that we may bring to You the tithes and offerings of a grateful heart and serve our neighbour in need with the resources You have supplied to us so abundantly.

Good Shepherd, You set Your table among us in the presence of our enemies. Hear us because we are beset by so many false voices and tempted by so many false gospels. Help us to hear Your voice and to abide safely in Your Word that remains forever. Equip us with Your Spirit so that we may receive Your body and blood with faith and a repentant heart.

O great Good Shepherd, we pray You to hear Your sheep and answer our prayers with mercy, granting us those things profitable for us and our salvation and keeping from us all things harmful; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.