

# Introduction

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Welcome to St. Peter's Lutheran Church Estevan. Pastor Kleemola here to bring you a partial service for the Seventh Sunday of Easter – May 24, 2020.

## Readings for the Seventh Sunday of Easter

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First Reading: Acts 1:12-26  
Psalm: Psalm 68:1-10  
Epistle: 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11  
Gospel: John 17:1-11

Text for today's Sermon is taken from 1 Peter 4:12–19; 5:6–11

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<sup>12</sup>Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup>But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup>If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. <sup>15</sup>But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. <sup>16</sup>Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. <sup>17</sup>For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup>And

“If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

<sup>19</sup>Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. . . .

<sup>6</sup>Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, <sup>7</sup>casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup>Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. <sup>9</sup>Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. <sup>10</sup>And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. <sup>11</sup>To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

# Sermon – Reality Check

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

Dear friends in Christ Jesus “Read the fine print. Know what you’re getting into.” These are words of caution for anyone signing a contract. Many a person has been surprised by a contract when she or he learned that something was written “in the fine print.” Some very popular preachers today on every continent attract devotees by assuring people that followers of Jesus will be blessed with good health, wealth, and security if only they believe. It is then a blow to their listeners’ faith and confidence in Jesus when they experience suffering and trials. Upon closer examination of Scripture with faithful pastors or friends, they realize that Jesus never promised such a thing. In fact, as we shall see, Jesus said something much different. The reality is that Christians *will suffer* for the name of Jesus. But in the midst of suffering and trials, The Reality of Easter Prepares You for the Reality of Discipleship.

From the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry as He called the first apostles, He spoke in very frank terms about what would happen to them because they followed Him. They would be reviled, persecuted, and evil things would be said about them because they followed Him. Jesus told them to rejoice and be glad when those things would happen, because their reward would be great in heaven. (Mt 5:11) At other times, He told the disciples that they would be handed over to authorities to be beaten and punished. They would be hated by the world. (Jn 15:18–19) Jesus also spoke of another kind of severe suffering for those who follow Him. Shortly after Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper with His disciples, Jesus spoke to Peter: **“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.”** (Lk 22:31–32) Jesus never hid the reality of suffering for His name’s sake from His disciples. In fact, He was quite graphic in describing the details.

But Jesus prepared His apostles for those times of suffering with encouragement and hope. As Jesus was in the Upper Room with His disciples on the night when He was betrayed, He told them, **“I have said these things to you to keep you from falling away.”** Now listen closely to what follows immediately: **“But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes [that is, persecutions] you may remember that I told them to you.”** (Jn 16:1, 4) Then, right after Jesus told the disciples these things, He told them that the time had come when they would scatter out of fear, leaving Him all alone. **“Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace.”** (16:32–33) Additionally, Jesus assured

the disciples that He would continue to pray for them. (Lk 22:32; Jn 17)

This kind of straight talk about their suffering, along with Jesus' words of encouragement and comfort, would become very important to the apostles as they would continue the teaching of Jesus through their apostolic office. At the time, they did not have a clue about what kind of suffering they would need to endure, even though they heard the words. But the Holy Spirit would bring these words of Jesus to their remembrance after Jesus was raised from the dead and in the days following. (Jn 2:22; 12:16) In time, the apostles lived the reality of suffering for the name of Jesus.

You know this reality too. If you are at all open about talking about your faith, you are sure to face challenges from those who don't believe. When you're talking about some tragedy – and there's been no shortage of those lately from the outbreaks of COVID 19 in nursing homes, to the crash of one of the Snowbirds planes, to the crash of the helicopter in NATO exercises – someone is sure to question, "What kind of God allows that kind of thing to happen?" The truth is that bad things happen in the world because there is sin in the world, and sin causes brokenness on every level – but not many really want to hear that. They just want to rail against God whom they hate for whatever reason. Or if it's something like the shooting rampage in Nova Scotia, the same question is likely to arise. But there, the real answer is, "The kind who sent His Son to die for one who who did that." The sad fact is that believers are always going to face unfair criticism, barbed remarks, and whatever else our enemy wants to use to make our Christian walk more difficult. Our response should be to follow Peter's directive: **"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."** (1Pet 3:15)

The apostles continued this kind of frank talk about suffering for Jesus' sake as part of their catechetical instruction to the church, especially as it began to grow and was increasingly dispersed. The opening of Peter's pastoral letter indicates it is written **"to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia."** (1 Pet 1:1) Peter's letter to Jewish and Gentile converts in Asia Minor – modern-day Turkey – was to provide pastoral instruction about the Christian life in Jesus, including the reality of suffering.

Just as Jesus told the apostles that He wanted them to know suffering was in store for them so they would not fall away, Peter echoes this reality in a pastoral way in our text, as if to say, "he who has ears to hear, let him hear": **"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."** (4:12) Today we might say, "Forewarned is forearmed." When you are persecuted for following Jesus, when

you are reviled, insulted, shunned, shut out, ridiculed, arrested, imprisoned, sifted as wheat by Satan through severe trials, do not be alarmed. There is no need to ask God why this is happening to you. There is no reason to be ashamed. This kind of suffering as a Christian is an uncomfortable, hot, fiery trial to test you, Peter writes. When metals and ore are heated in the testing pot, it can be determined what their makeup is. Spiritual trials *test* us, revealing our makeup. These fiery trials were often experienced by people of faith in the Old Testament. For example, God said to Israel through the prophet Isaiah, **“I have refined you...; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.”** (Is 48:10)

Fiery trials show us how weak and helpless we are. They reveal how utterly dependent we are on God's grace and mercy, and how much we need the prayers of Jesus so that we may bear them. When we are in the midst of these trials, we are often driven more deeply into God's Word and prayer. We yearn more for words of comfort and hope as we hear God's Word and receive the body and blood of Jesus. It is only then that we are able to rejoice in our sufferings. It is then, as we hear the voice of God speak to us just as clearly as Jesus spoke to the apostles, that we are reminded we are not alone through these trials. That gives us a whole new perspective. We can confess with assurance and joy, **“The Spirit of glory and God rests upon me. I am blessed when I am insulted, for I share Christ's sufferings. He has counted me worthy to suffer for his name.”** So we need not despair in our suffering as though God were punishing us. It is quite the opposite. Rather, as Peter urges, we entrust our soul to the faithful Creator so we can go about doing the good that He has called us to do. We can let go of worrying about suffering and cast all of our anxieties on Jesus because He cares for us.

The life of a Christian is secure in Jesus. However, Peter urges us, we must be watchful because we have an enemy who seeks to rob us of our Easter joy and our faithfulness to Christ. Peter reminds us to remain vigilant. This is no game of make-believe. Satan is real. Be watchful. Martin Luther noted that the world is the realm of the devil and we would be wise to regard our life as if we were staying in a hotel where every other guest was a robber. We would do whatever we could to protect ourselves and likely not get much sleep. In other words, we would be on our constant guard. (see AE 30:140)

Make no mistake. Satan is our adversary, prowling around like a lion. If you've watched nature programs on TV where lions are in the wild, or even observed a yard cat, you know that they see their prey long before the prey is aware. The lion studies the movements and stealthily creeps along the tall grass until the prey is not paying attention. Then it springs forth and sinks its teeth and claws into its prey, putting the death grip of its jaws around the throat.

Not only be watchful, but resist Satan when he tempts you, Peter says, remaining firm in your faith. Hold onto the Word of God in your heart and use it as Jesus did during His temptations from Satan. Do not give up or let go of the Word for anything. And know that you are not alone. Not only does the Spirit of God rest upon you and go with you through these fiery trials, but countless Christians join you as well. The same type of suffering is experienced by your sisters and brothers in the faith throughout the world. Yes, you truly can, as Peter writes, “[cast] **all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.**” (5:7)

Satan is not in charge. The world, who serves as Satan's puppet, is not in charge. It may appear that way, as he and the world wage all sorts of warfare against Christians. But Jesus demonstrated that *He* is Lord of lords. Scripture tells us that Jesus descended into hell to announce His resurrection victory to all, right under the nose of Satan. Satan used worthless people to lie about Jesus and falsely accuse Him, resulting in His crucifixion, but the reality is that no one *took* Jesus' life. He laid down His life willingly to be the perfect sacrifice for sin. What Satan intended for destruction; Jesus used for our salvation. When Jesus breathed His last, our sin fully atoned for, Satan thought Jesus would be buried and forgotten as some misfit. But the Lord of Life would not be contained. Having destroyed the curse of sin, Jesus burst forth from the tomb, swallowing up death and giving in its place everlasting life. He lives! He lives! Therefore, Peter says, “**after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever.**” (5:10–11)

There is no fine print to be concerned about in your discipleship of Jesus. No gimmicks. It is a reality that *you will suffer* trials for the name of Jesus. But they will not last forever. At the right time, Jesus, the mighty hand of God, will exalt you. He will restore you, confirm you, strengthen you, and establish you. Your suffering will be over, and you will be with Him in the everlasting paradise that He has prepared for you, rejoicing with gladness as His glory is revealed. Amen

## Prayer of the Church

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Guard Your people, O Lord, and grant us unity of faith and singleness of heart as we come to You in prayer.

Lord, You have promised not to abandon Your people but to be with us always. Grant us grace to hear Your Word with faith and receive Your Holy Sacrament with repentant hearts, and to

keep what we hear and receive upon our lips in holy lives.

Lord, You have delivered the saints from fiery trial and raised up the martyr from the darkness of death to everlasting life. Give us courage, that we may give bold witness to the truth in our own day and proclaim Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

Lord, You have pledged to us Your Spirit and promised to supply Your Church with pastors who will preach and teach Your Word. We rejoice that this coming Friday, 7 new pastors, including our adopted student Josh Kurtenbach, will receive the first calls to serve in Your church. Give us ears to hear and hearts to believe Your Word. Raise up those who will serve Your Church in generations to come, that we may never be without the aid of those to serve us in Your name.

Lord, You have power over all things and appoint an order on earth for the protection of the weak, the punishment of evildoers and the encouragement of virtue. Bless Justin Trudeau, our Prime Minister, Scott Moe, our Premier, and all who make, administer and judge our laws. Give them wisdom for the challenges of our times, and preserve them from self-serving concerns. Give us grace, that we may honour the gift of freedom and be good citizens and neighbours to all.

Lord, You have compassion upon all who suffer. Give grace to the sick, to those with mental illness, to the dying in their last hours and to those who grieve. Hear us especially for Pattie Berday, Miriam Koch, Gerald Olson, Wanda Stang, and those we name in our hearts before You. Grant them patience in their afflictions, and deliver them according to Your gracious will.

Lord, You are the source of all wisdom and knowledge. Bless those who teach, those who learn and especially those who graduate this year. Be the hope of those whose plans have been disappointed, and grant that all graduates would find good employment. Guide them in the pursuit of Your Word and truth, to live honourable lives in worthy vocations, that in all things You may be glorified.

Lord, You have given us Your own Son as our Saviour and Redeemer. He has set His table among us in the presence of our enemies, that we might be fed upon the body of Christ and drink His blood. Guard the unity of this table, that we would confess Him with one voice and receive this blessed Sacrament with one faith, and hear our prayers for all for whom gathering has been made difficult.

# Benediction

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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.