

Easter 4A, 2011

Text: 1 Peter 2:19-25

Title: Suffering like Christ

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Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

Easter is a time for Baptisms. In the past two weeks Brooklyn, Briella, and Caiden have been born again as children of God, and we have given thanks for the blessing that our baptism has been in our life.

Baptism is a new start, a new beginning, a whole new life.

But it's not an easy life. In fact your life gets much more difficult the moment you are baptized. You are now in Satan's crosshairs. He has you in his sights. And he will do whatever he can to disconnect you from Jesus Christ.

St. Peter is honest and upfront with those who have been baptized. He wants them to know what to expect as children of God.

St. Peter teaches you three basic points:

- 1) You are called to do good.
- 2) When you do good you will suffer.
- 3) When you endure suffering, it's good thing.

So first, you are called to good. This seems pretty basic, but it's worth talking about for a few minutes.

Your life should change as a result of belonging to Christ. Your life should look different. In very simple terms, you are called to do good, as St. Peter says.

Last week we heard how God's Word remains forever. Even if the grass withers and the flowers fade, God's Word will remain forever.

This includes not only God's gospel promises, but also the demands of His law. God's law doesn't change. Even after thousands of years, you are still called to love God and love your neighbor.

As one who has been baptized you are to have no other gods, you are not to use God's Name in vain, you are to keep His day holy, you are to honor your father and mother, you are not to hurt or harm your neighbor, you are not to commit adultery, you are not to steal, you are not to tell lies, you are not to covet what isn't yours.

God's law doesn't change. Even if all your friends and neighbors disagree, even if the rest of the world says, "go ahead," you listen to your heavenly Father. He loves you, and he knows what's best for you.

He's given you some good to do. Just take a look at where you are at in life. If you're a husband love your wife and take care of her, if you're a wife, love your husband and respect him. If you're a parent, love your kids, and if you're kid honor your parents. If you're a boss treat your employees well, if you're an employee work hard and be honest.

Those are the good things that God has sent you to do. You don't have build orphanages in Africa or join the peace corps (but if you have those gifts, go ahead), just look around and love the people in your life. Do some good.

Hopefully when you do good, people will recognize it and thank you for it. But it doesn't always happen that way.

Look at Jesus. He did lots of good. He healed the sick and raised the dead, he taught the people and gave them hope. But He angered the religious leaders and ended up suffering for doing good.

That's what your life will look like. Jesus is the example, the pattern, the template. St. Peter writes, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you may follow in His steps."

Here St. Peter gives two pictures of what the Christian life looks like. First, He says that Jesus has left you an example. Second, He says that you should follow in His steps.

First, St. Peter calls Christ your example. He uses a very specific Greek word here. St. Peter calls Jesus our "Hypogrammon." Hypo- means under. A hyodermic needle goes under your skin. Grammon means letter. Grammar is the study of letters and words. So a "hypogrammon" is an "under-letter."

When you learned to write, in St. Peter's day, they would give you a set of letters that had been perfectly formed. And then you would place a very thin piece of tracing paper on top, so that you could still see the letters underneath. And then you would learn to write by carefully tracing the letters underneath your paper, the "under-letters", the model for your writing.

St. Peter compares Jesus to these "under-letters" that the students would trace as they learned to write.

Jesus is your example, your model, your template. In Lent we look at many different images and pictures of Jesus. These pictures are the model for you to follow. Your life should look like Jesus' life.

Jesus did good and He suffered for it. When people insulted Him, He didn't insult them back. When Jesus suffered, He didn't threaten those who abused Him.

He trusted that His father would take care of Him.

That's the model for you to follow. Do good, suffer, and trust in God.

Now we will never be able to follow the model perfectly. Our letters never look as nice as Jesus. When I was in school, handwriting was one of my worst subjects. I was always in a rush, in hurry, and my writing was sloppy.

And I was not a good artist either, but I like to trace pictures from my favorite books. They never looked as good as the original, but it was much better than if I tried to draw them on my own.

But no matter how many times we fail, we keep learning, we keep trying to follow Jesus' pattern. It won't come out perfectly, but that's not the point. Jesus is the goal that we strive after.

When I hear St. Peter's words about following Jesus' footsteps, for some reason I picture a father and his young son walking through deep snow. The father goes first, trudging along through the snow, while the son follows behind, walking in the footsteps. Sometimes the snow is just too deep or the footsteps are too far apart and the boy just can't make it. And then the Father turns back picks up his son and sets his feet back on the right path.

When you hear St. Peter's words about following Jesus' example, and walking in His footsteps, you can hear them as harsh law- fall into line, you've got to imitate Jesus perfectly.

Instead, hear them as gracious gift.

After God makes you His child in Holy Baptism, He doesn't abandon you, He doesn't leave you on your own to figure life out.

Instead, He gives you Jesus as your example, with His footsteps to follow, so that you know how to live in a way that pleases Him.

Whenever I had a new teacher in school, I was always nervous about the first assignment, the paper that I had to write. It was hard to know exact what the teacher expected and what they were looking for. Sometimes they would provide an example, an A paper that had been written by a previous student and so we would know what they were expecting or looking for.

Jesus is that example, that model, A student. We will never live up to the standard He set, but now we know what we should do and how to please God.

And when we do fall short, we know that we are forgiven, that Jesus Christ Himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, that we have healing through His wounds. He is our Good Shepherd, who brings us back when we stray.

So go out there and do some good, even if you suffer, knowing that as you suffer, your life looks like Christ's.

Christ suffered and died for doing good, but He rose again, and so will you.

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