

The Second Sunday after Christmas | 1 Peter 4:12-19  
January 3, 2016 | Parkland Evangelical Lutheran Church

**In Nomine Iesu**

+ + +

Merciful God, faithful Father, You chasten all whom You love, that they may not be condemned with the wicked, we humbly ask You, comfort us in our afflictions with Your Word and Spirit, so that by patience we may overcome the miseries of this present world, in the firm and joyful hope that You will speedily turn our sorrow into joy and glory everlasting; for the sake of Your dear Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 121)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

---

*The sermon text for this morning is taken from the fourth chapter of St. Peter's first epistle. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

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. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. / 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? And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

---

*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, through whose name and no other is found life and salvation, dear fellow redeemed:

If we compiled our lists of New Year's resolutions, I imagine these items would be among the most common: eat healthier, exercise more, budget better, stay positive. Year in and year out, these things always seem to be at the top of the list. But some of our resolutions change too. We may resolve to befriend a neighbor or co-worker whom we have generally avoided. We may resolve to try to mend our relationship with an estranged family member or friend. We may resolve to spend more time in Bible study, devotion, and prayer. But I don't think this particular resolution would show up on any of our lists: This year, I resolve to suffer. Why would we ever want that?

In today's sermon text from St. Peter's first epistle, he does not tell us to seek out suffering. But he does say that suffering is a reality for every follower of Christ. As long as we are in this world and have faith in Jesus, we will experience conflict. This sounds like a bad thing, but it is actually a sign of God's grace. If He did not love you, He would not have sent His Son to save you, and the Holy Spirit would not have brought you to faith in Him. But He does love you,

and He has done all these things for you. No treasures of the world can measure up to the gifts given us by our Lord. This is why a Christian can bear up under suffering for the Gospel and may even welcome it as a sign of God's favor. **God Grants Christians the Privilege of Suffering for Christ's Name.**

## I

God created the heavens and the earth. He made all of it, and all of it was good. Then Satan and a number of the angels rebelled against God, and the devil enticed Adam and Eve to sin. The world was plunged into darkness, and the sting of death was felt by man and animal alike. The creation was no longer comfortable with its Creator. He was holy, but the world was full of sin. This is why God did not receive a warm welcome when He took on flesh in Mary's womb. Jesus was treated like a hostile intruder. When the wise men told King Herod that they were seeking the "king of the Jews," he immediately began plotting this Child's death (Mt. 2:1-8). In the Holy Gospel for today, you heard about how Joseph, Mary, and Jesus had to flee from Bethlehem, and how Herod carried out the murder of all those helpless baby boys in that region.

Then think about how often Jesus had confrontations with demons in His public work, or how the religious leaders of the Jews were constantly looking for ways to discredit and kill Him. The common people grew frustrated with Jesus when He did not become the king they were looking for. Even the twelve disciples were guilty of misunderstanding Jesus' work, while they urged Him to adjust His message and mission. Jesus suffered in the world from day one until His suffering was completed on the cross. His experience was not what it should have been. He should have been welcomed and honored and glorified as the only true God. But instead the world hated Him. This kingdom of darkness could not bear the blinding light of His holy presence.

The same goes for those who follow Jesus, who have been brought out of the darkness of unbelief and into the light of His grace. Christians are called to be lights in the world, "*so that [others] may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*" (Mt. 5:16), as Jesus says. But just like Cain's jealousy and hatred because of his brother Abel's righteousness, the unbelieving world hates Christians for their hope in Christ and their love for their neighbors (1Jn. 3:11-13). Jesus said about this, "*If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*" (Jn. 15:19). As it was for Christ, so it is for Christians.

The suffering of Christians began shortly after Jesus' Ascension. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles at Pentecost, and they began to boldly preach the truth about Jesus' death and resurrection. They were even so bold as to preach in the courts of the temple. For this preaching, they were promptly arrested by the temple rulers, who "*charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus*" (4:18). When the apostles continued to preach in Jesus' name by the power of the Holy Spirit, they were arrested again. This time they were beaten and again ordered "*not to speak in the name of Jesus*" (5:40). But as they left, it is recorded that they were "*rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ*" (vv. 41-42).

I admire their courage, and I wonder if I would have the same courage in a similar situation. If I were beat up for confessing the truth about Jesus, would I crawl away rejoicing? I worry that I

would rather question God. I might wonder why He was allowing such pain to be inflicted on me when I was only standing up for Him. Would any father watch his child get beat up for his sake? But the apostles saw it differently. They did not resent the suffering. They recognized it as evidence of God's grace; He counted them worthy to suffer for His name. They knew they were poor, miserable sinners by nature, but in His love God chose them not only to believe, but also to confess the saving truth to others. They were humbled and overjoyed that He would use them, even them, as preachers of His grace.

## II

You might not get beat up for being a Christian like the apostles were. You might not die a martyr's death like so many Christians throughout history have. But suffering also comes in other forms to the Christian. It might be friends who make fun of you for being a virgin or for not joining them in looking at pornography. It might be employers who refuse to hire or promote you when they learn about your beliefs. It might be family or other acquaintances who ridicule you for your faith, or who constantly remind you of your lifestyle and behavior before you became a Christian. Times like these make us wonder if being a Christian is worth it. But just like He did for the apostles, God sends the Holy Spirit through the means of grace to encourage and strengthen us.

He also uses our suffering to point us to Jesus. In this way He turns suffering, though painful, into something good. Now often our suffering happens because of our sin. We say something unkind. We do something wrong. And then we feel the consequences of our words and actions. But Jesus suffered having done nothing wrong. St. Peter writes, *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God"* (1Pe. 3:18). He was perfectly righteous; He should not have had to suffer, but He willingly did so for your sake and mine. His love for you was so great, that He considered it a privilege to suffer for you and all sinners. He suffered and died, so that you would have His glory and life. If anyone can relate to your suffering, it is Jesus.

When you and I suffer as Christians, we suffer because of Christ, for His name. The unbelieving world does not attack us because we are so holy or because we claim to speak truthfully at all times. Unbelievers see the sin in believers just as they see it in themselves. When they *"revile and persecute you"* (Mt. 5:11), they are really reviling and persecuting Christ. Jesus said, *"If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of My name, because they do not know Him who sent Me"* (Jn. 15:20-21). If we did not believe in Jesus, we would not be willing to suffer for His name. So when we do suffer for His name, it is a sign that we are His own, members of His body. St. Peter again writes, *"If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."*

He also said, *"But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed."* We can endure any suffering that comes this year or any other year, knowing that compared with the *"eternal weight of glory,"* it is really just *"light momentary affliction"* (2Cor. 4:17), as Scripture says. Of course suffering hardly ever feels "light" or "momentary." Even so, *"the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us"* (Rom. 8:18). *"When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory"* (Col. 3:4). Suffering now in time, but glory forever and ever.

So while it is true that **God Grants Christians the Privilege of Suffering for Christ's Name**, it is also true that He grants you grace and courage and strength to bear the suffering. He brings Jesus to you in the Word and Sacraments, and by those means also brings you to Jesus, preserving your faith in Him and keeping you in His body. God does not have to resolve to love you better this year or next year. He loves you perfectly now and always, and He will not forsake you in your suffering. Even when you find it difficult to rejoice in your suffering, God always rejoices in you, for you are His own beloved child redeemed by His Son and sanctified by His Spirit. And on the Last Day, He will replace every memory of pain and suffering with the reality of glory, glory obtained for you by Him who suffered all things in your place. *Amen.*

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

+ + +