

Sermon for Easter 4, Good Shepherd Sunday

Text: 1 Peter 2:19-25; Theme: “The Good Shepherd Calls us to Follow his Example”

1 Peter 2:19-25

¹⁹ For this is favorable: if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God. ²⁰ For what credit is it to you if you receive a beating for sinning and patiently endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God. ²¹ Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps. ²² He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. ²³ When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

In the name of Jesus, dear fellow redeemed,

I don't know how much you know about sheep. But they are not very smart animals. They are dependent on the shepherd and they cannot defend themselves. I remember as a boy, we had a sheep herder in the congregation and one of his ewes had triplets. When that happens, the two older, stronger lambs will often keep the smallest, weakest one from nursing even if the ewe has enough milk. So our sheep herder friend brought us the smallest lamb and asked us to bottle feed it and raise it during that summer. But here was this poor little lamb that was missing its mother. The little one was baaa-ing and bawling for quite some time after the lights went out that night. So my mother took the dress she had been wearing that day, especially since it was expendable, and threw it on the straw next to the lamb. It was as if my mother were right there with the lamb. The little ewe lamb calmed down and was quiet the rest of the night. Sheep are very dependent animals.

Scripture aptly uses the picture of a sheep to describe you and me in our lost, sinful condition. We are completely dependent on Jesus our Shepherd. But the Bible also shows us that the grace of God gives us power through our Good Shepherd, Christ. He gives us the power to live as his redeemed children.

Once we know that we belong to our Savior's sheep pen, we find that we are sheep with a unique relationship to the shepherd. He calls us to pattern our lives after him. The apostle Peter understood his own spiritual helplessness. But he also knew firsthand that he had a unique relationship to the Good Shepherd. And

because of that relationship Peter says, “The Good Shepherd Calls us to Follow His Example.”

Peter wrote his two letters to both Jewish and Gentile Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor. Some of them may have been present at Pentecost when Peter told the crowd that God had made the crucified Christ both God and Lord. We can tell from his letter that Peter writes to people in all classes of society. But his inspired words before us today are addressed specifically to slaves. And yet, all Christians, whether employer or employee, in factory, office or home can benefit from Peter’s instruction.

From history we know Christians were not treated well at Peter’s time. The situation got worse and worse until the time that Rome was burned and emperor Nero blamed Christians for that disaster. Peter himself was one of Nero’s targets. It’s easy to see that Christians lived in a hostile society.

Undoubtedly slaves who were Christians got a lot of harsh treatment from heathen masters who supported their heathen emperor. It may have appeared to the heathen master that his Christian slave was an enemy of the emperor since the emperor blamed Christians for the burning of Rome. A heathen master would very likely treat his Christian slave rather harshly.

But Peter gives his fellow Christians encouragement. **“For this is favorable: if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God.** (v. 19) Peter reminds us that a Christian owes it to God to bear suffering when he did nothing wrong because he is conscious of what God has done for him. By our patient attitude toward suffering God wants us to give evidence of our Christian faith.

When we have to suffer mistreatment, when we have done nothing wrong it is very hard to let our Christian faith shine. It is hard to put aside the wrong when the boss blames you for someone else’s mistake and he simply won’t listen to your side of the story. But Peter says we owe it to God to consciously put into action the Christian conduct God expects of us.

Peter gives us the greatest example of all, that of our Good Shepherd. **“He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”²³ When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats.** (vv. 22-23) Jesus our Good Shepherd suffered the most unjust treatment of all. He was falsely accused, sentenced and crucified because he claimed to be the Son of God, which was absolutely true. On top of that he was humiliated and insulted as he

hung on the cross. You know the reason he did that. He did it for us, that all of the sins with which we insulted him may be washed clean. Our place at the side of our Good Shepherd behooves us to follow his example.

But what is our first reaction to unfair treatment? In our hearts don't we find anger and hatred and a desire for vengeance lurking there. And often those thoughts lead to actions of retaliation. I recall a time when I was perhaps about seven. A friend and I were playing in my sandbox. Another boy named Melvin came along and started talking to us while we were playing. My friend very innocently and quite accidentally did something that caused sand to fly in Melvin's face. Immediately Melvin picked up a handful of sand and threw it in my friend's face. My mother had seen all of this through the window and came out and asked Melvin why he had done that. To which Melvin replied, "Well, I had to pay him back!" That is the reaction of our sinful nature, isn't it, whether we are 8 or 88.

But as Christians who are maturing in our faith we will want to remember we have a higher standard to reach for. Peter uses an example. If you patiently take punishment you deserve for a sin or wrong you committed, that's no credit to you. But the Christian shows his relationship to the Good Shepherd in his conduct; he bears mistreatment patiently because he knows it pleases God that he should display his relationship to the Good Shepherd in that way. In fact, Peter says, it is part of our calling as Christians to show our relationship to the Good Shepherd by bearing unjust punishment. **"Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps."** (v. 21)

Jesus knows how hard it is to endure unjust suffering when the boss is on you constantly for picky little things. But if you bear that patiently you are giving several important messages. You show that you are not so concerned about what happens to you in this life. You show you can be content with life no matter what happens because there is something better to come. Secondly you show that you find your comfort not in violent retaliation but in something else.

When you show your relationship to the Good Shepherd by following his example God could very well cause the one mistreating you to wonder why you are patient. That could well be the opportunity for you to give an answer for the hope you have and to do so, as Peter says, with gentleness and respect. What an opportunity to share your faith in the Good Shepherd.

But so often when we are mistreated our sinful nature still says, “Yea, but I still feel he deserves to be paid back” just the way Melvin did in the sandbox. We may feel that way, but God says that vengeance belongs to him. We are to remember and follow the example of the Good Shepherd. When he suffered he humbly trusted in the One who vindicates all wrong.

Complaining about being mistreated can betray a littleness of trust in God. We perhaps think as Melvin did that we must right a wrong by paying back with insulting words the one who insults us. And so we nurse our sinful desire for revenge. But we forget something very important.

We forget that God has forgiven the sins of those who mistreat us. John reminds us that Jesus IS “The lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” That includes the sin of the person who treats you unfairly. So even if a fellow Christian mistreats you, you can treat him or her as a forgiven sinner. And remember that Jesus reminds us that God withholds his forgiveness if we fail to forgive one another from our hearts. The Savior also says, “If your fellow believer sins against you seven times in a day and seven times comes back to you and says, “I repent”, forgive him. And here Peter reminds us about our Savior’s attitude. **“When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”** Jesus placed himself completely in his Father’s hands, because as a true man he knew it was not his place to punish. God reserves punishment for himself and his appointed agent.

But on the other hand if someone repents of the wrong done to us we have no right to hold that sin over them and club them with the constant reminder of their sin. When we recognize how God has forgiven us, we will want to follow the example of the Good Shepherd and offer forgiveness to others as freely as God offers it to us.

The Good Shepherd’s substitutionary death has a bearing on how we accept suffering. **“He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed.”** Our Good Shepherd is more than an example for us. He is our reason for bearing all mistreatment patiently. He has showed us that the “I’ll pay you back” attitude is sin. And by his death and resurrection he has paid for our sins of vengefulness so we are no longer slaves to those sins. We are healed spiritually.

So Peter uses the idea of sheep and shepherd to bring across his point. **“For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”** When we sin we go astray, we leave our Good Shepherd’s side. And that is never more true than when we seek to retaliate against someone for some wrong either real or imagined. But Peter says you can come to God through the Good Shepherd. You can show that you have a relationship with him by trusting that no matter how much mistreatment you endure HE knows what is best for you.

Even if you suffer some kind of wrong in this life, God will not allow that to go unpunished. Remember that he punished all sin in Christ. And if the person who mistreated you does not turn to God for forgiveness, he will receive his due reward from God. His justice will never be thwarted. But as followers of the Good Shepherd we will fervently pray that all sinners will repent.

You certainly know that sheep do not strike back when they are attacked. They have to leave it up to the shepherd to defend them. The Christian must take the same attitude. God does not allow us to strike back when someone gossips about us and smears our reputation. He does not allow us the luxury of bearing a grudge against a Christian brother or sister for something that person did to you or said to you some months ago.

Remember what the Good Shepherd has done for you. He has cared for you. He has taken your sin away by enduring the punishment we deserved for our sin. That leaves each of us free and clear to imitate our Savior’s love so through us all people may see their Good Shepherd. Amen.