

Wednesday, March 7, 2018 – Lent Midweek IV
“Suffering”

1 Peter 2: 20-25

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Calling Us Home – CSL Series
Definition Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

God is calling us home and sometimes the journey brings us suffering. Tonight I want to talk again about suffering but not just any kind of suffering. We're not going to think about the suffering that comes from your arthritis, cancer, heart disease or what have you. I don't mean to make light of physical ailments and please, keep listening because at the end of the sermon I will say something about our physical ailments. We're also not going to be thinking about self-inflicted suffering, the kinds of suffering that result from your mistake or your sin. For example, you get romantically involved with someone who is not your spouse or you take some money from work (of course you intend to pay it back!), and things like that. St. Peter says, "What credit is it if, when you sin, you are beaten for it and endure?" Everyone in the world suffers for one reason or another but tonight Peter teaches us about a suffering that is unique to us Christians. This is the unjust suffering that comes our way because we are followers of Jesus. In 1 Peter 4:16 Peter says, "If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name." We can put it this way: Since you are "peculiar" people, as we talked about last week, you can expect some suffering because of your faith. The text that we'll meditate upon the next minutes says, "To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you. To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you."

You and I should be more and more aware of suffering for our faith. "Open Doors USA" is an organization in Santa Ana, California that tracks the persecution of Christians around the world. Listen to this from their website. "Each month 322 Christians are killed for their faith. 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed. 772 forms of violence are committed against Christians (such as beatings, abductions, rapes, arrests and forced marriages)." John Allen, Jr. has written a book titled, "The Global War on Christians" (Image, 2013). As the title says, this is global, not just confined to Muslim countries in the Middle East. Mr. Allen cites one study that says 45 million of our fellow believers in Jesus were martyred in the twentieth century (Wall Street Journal, December 20, 2013; A17).

If it still feels far away, know that many recent immigrants, whether it's the new sister congregation in our circuit, that is the new east African Oromo congregation that holds worship at Faith Community, or our longstanding partner of west Africans at New Life Ministries down on DI, are among those who have personally been persecuted or suffer for their faith – such is the story of many immigrants by the way, who are helping to breathe new life into Christianity in our nation where we've watched a slow decline in Christianity, even as the center of gravity in numbers and in leadership moves to Africa, Asia and South America, many brothers and sisters from there now stand on our shores. This is nothing less than the hand of God, helping the spread of the Gospel in our local churches and communities in the decades to come. Now when Peter wrote tonight's text, persecutions hadn't started yet but they were just around the corner. Anti-Christian sentiment was heating up.

The people who received Peter's epistle were being socially persecuted. These early Christians were a small minority of the population and so most people had no idea what Christianity was all about. The Christian to whom Peter wrote didn't have easy lives. They were not citizens. In fact, some of them were slaves. This evening's text is addressed especially to slaves. The general population didn't know what Christianity stood for but they did notice that these followers of Jesus didn't join in some of their civic events, their social events and parties, even their orgies. So people talked about the Christians behind their backs. They slandered them. They shunned them. Can you identify with that kind of persecution, unjust suffering for faith? There are times when following Jesus means speaking up for someone who is being trashed by gossip. There are times when following Jesus means opposing unethical business practices. There are times when following Jesus means you're not going to go to some event to which you've been invited. Follow Jesus instead of running with the crowd and sooner or later you'll be slandered, perhaps even shunned. You may well pay a price in your reputation and your career. So what's Peter's advice to them and to us?

St. Peter's advice... Really this is God's word to us, is this: act as Jesus did when He suffered unjustly: *“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.”*

Jesus is our example. When he was sinned against; He didn't sin back. When his enemies came at Him, He didn't respond with deceitful words; He didn't "spin." He spoke the truth. And when He did suffer unjustly, He didn't lash out with cursing and swearing. Unjust suffering makes us angry. Anger is a natural emotion that we feel when we are threatened or something dear to us is threatened. Anger at unjust suffering is not wrong. What's wrong is when we let our anger lead us to respond to sin with sin. Jesus didn't do that. He's our example when we take it on the chin for Christ. Jesus teaches us to endure and to trust our vindication to God. 1 Peter 4:19 says, "Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good."

Now comes the most important thing. Listen up! Jesus is more than an example; He is your Savior. We've got to keep the distinction clear between example and savior. If you're drowning, you don't need a swimming instructor to show how to swim, you need to be saved. If you're trapped in a burning house, you don't need an example of putting new batteries into your smoke detectors during time changes, you need to be saved. If you're in a bad car accident you don't need an example of defensive driving. You need the Jaws of Life. Yes, Jesus is our example but first and foremost Jesus is our Savior. He rescues us from the eternal consequences of our sins: *"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."*

Jesus bore our sins on the cross so that we can receive forgiveness from God. Jesus died so that we can live for what God teaches us is good and right. Jesus died for our restoration and to bring us back to our heavenly Father. Because we trust that Jesus is our Savior, we are willing to suffer for Him as God is calling us home.

You've got to appreciate Peter. When it came to unjust suffering and persecution, he did it all, both good and bad. When he was sitting around the fire outside the palace of the High Priest, they said, "You're a follower of Jesus!" Peter lied, caved into the peer pressure. He regretted that bitterly. In the Garden of Gethsemane Peter got so angry at unjust suffering that he pulled out his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus said, "Put that thing

away. We don't meet sin with sin." When persecutions were starting up at Rome, and remember physical persecutions did come at Rome shortly after tonight's text was written...

When persecutions started up, Peter high-tailed it out of town. Tradition says Jesus appeared to Peter on the road and asked, "Where are you going?" Peter turned around and went back to suffer unjustly. Tradition says he was crucified upside down.

God promises to make it all right in his own time. And physical ailments? They're not easy to bear but we can endure them. You and I have a Savior and one day our pain and suffering will be no more. And the suffering we brought on ourselves because of our own sin? God forgives that because of Jesus and one day we will feel the shame and guilt no more. And because God promises to make it right in his own time, here's a twist, a strange twist to end the sermon. St. Peter, the man who knew, says suffering is reason to rejoice. *"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes through it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 1:5-7)

"To this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you." In Jesus' name, Amen.