

Easter 4 / April 30, 2023

1 Peter 2:24

“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.”

Healed by the Shepherd’s Wounds

Peter begins our text saying, “For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrow while suffering unjustly.” On the surface this seems an odd statement, as if implying there is something gracious about sorrow and unjust suffering; as if sorrow and suffering were good in and of themselves. Yet the grace of which he speaks is not the sorrow of suffering. Grace is being mindful of God in our sorrows as we suffer. Sorrow and suffering are not good in themselves. They are the symptoms and effects of sin, which entered creation when the first humans destroyed their perfect relationship with God and chose to sin. Their disobedience brought sin and death into the world and has plagued their descendants since time immemorial. Sorrow and suffering are the curse of sin. In the recreation they will be no more.

The grace of which Peter speaks is the blessing of being mindful of God and discerning His presence in our sorrows and receiving His strength in our sufferings. Grace is that God gave Christ to bear our sins on the cross that we would be forgiven, reconciled to Him in peace and receive perfect healing and eternal life in the resurrection of Christ. In Christ we continue to live in this world in bondage to sin and cursed by sorrow and suffering. In this world it is a gracious thing to know that Christ is with us and empowers us to endure suffering, entrusting ourselves to God. Mindful of God, we witness to His grace given in Christ, offered for all to receive, both through our words and by living in His righteousness. We are healed by the Shepherd’s wounds and through Him we have comfort in our sorrows, relief in our sufferings and hope in all things.

It is a gracious thing to see Christ in our sufferings. Not only does this bring meaning to our experience of pain and empowerment in our affliction, it also gives us an awareness of the pain Christ experienced paying the debt of our sin on the cross. Most importantly it gives us a sense of the depth of His love for each one of us and for every human soul. We experience the effects of sin, our sin, the sins of others and the sin of the world, in our sorrows and sufferings. We sense the power of God’s love when we realize that on the cross, Christ suffered for our sin, the sins of others and the sin of the world. Our sufferings are a sharing in the sufferings of Christ, in the sense that they lead us to consider the deep love that moved Him to share our sorrows as a human being and to bear our sins as the Saviour. It is a gracious thing to be mindful of God in sorrow and suffering, because we see Jesus, experience His presence, feel the power and receive the promise of His love. It is a gracious thing to find Christ’s presence in our sufferings. He gives us strength to endure, consolation in our sorrows and hope for the future.

Peter writes, “By His wounds you have been healed.” It is the most gracious thing to know that Christ has healed us in the most important way, spiritually in relationship with the heavenly Father through His wounds and the blood He shed on the cross. Sin, suffering, sorrow and death are symptoms of sin and signs of human brokenness in relationship with God. Although we are healed in relationship with God through the wounds of Christ, believers continue to experience the effects of sin, in the sorrows and sufferings that are common to life in this world in bondage to sin and under the condemnation of death. It is the most gracious thing to know that in the wounds of Christ, we are healed in our relationship with the heavenly Father. It is a gracious thing to know that He gives us strength to bear our sufferings. It is a gracious thing to know that Christ is with us in our sorrows. It is a gracious thing to know that in Christ we have a real and living hope of an eternal life, in which sin and all its sad effects have forever passed away. We are healed and given hope by the Shepherd’s wounds.

Peter’s concern writing to believers in Asia Minor was that they entrust themselves to God in their sufferings and give a good witness to their families, friends and neighbours, by the way they experienced sorrow and responded to suffering for the sake of Christ. The way we deal with suffering and respond to sorrow is a witness to our faith in Christ, the power and promise of His love. We give a good witness to Christ and the hope we have in Him, when we entrust ourselves to God in our trials, knowing He loves us. We give a good witness to Christ and the hope we have in Him, when we deal with sorrow in hope and respond to suffering by entrusting ourselves to God, for the sake of Christ our Shepherd and Saviour.

Peter's words apply to all suffering in general, but he was writing specifically about the suffering believers experience because of our faith in Christ. He didn't want the believers in Asia Minor to develop a hostile attitude towards their non-believing family, friends and neighbours. He wanted them to witness to God's love in Christ and call them to faith by their gracious words and actions, so they also might know Christ as Saviour. Peter didn't want the believers to return hatred with hatred and hostility with hostility. He reminded them of Christ, who in His suffering neither threatened or cursed, but instead spoke words of healing, praying, "Father forgive them."

Peter reminded them that like the people who were causing them pain, they too were once like sheep who were going astray. At one time they also once followed the futile ways of the fallen world whose pleasures are temporary and which pass away in time and end in death. They had returned to the Shepherd of their souls. Through their words and by the witness of their actions, the Shepherd of all souls was reaching out to their families, friends and neighbours that they too might come to faith and entrust themselves to God. We are blessed both to believe in Christ our Shepherd and Saviour and to share Him and the promise of His love with others.

We share the gospel through our words and by entrusting ourselves to God in all our sorrows. Peter writes, "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." We have been healed by the Shepherd's wounds. We have forgiveness in our sins, healing in our relationship with God and the promise of sharing in Christ's resurrection to a new and eternal life. Because we have been healed by the Shepherd's wounds, we can be mindful of God in our sufferings, find His presence in our sorrows and receive His consolation in Christ Jesus. We have been healed by the Shepherd's wounds. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to follow in the example of Christ.

Christ overcame temptation by the power of the word. He lived in righteousness and committed no sin, by the power of the Spirit within Him. When He was sinned against, He forgave. When He suffered unjustly, He entrusted Himself to His loving Father. When He was reviled, He spoke words of forgiveness, healing and love. By His wounds we are healed in relationship with God in the forgiveness of our sins. By the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us through our baptism into His death and resurrection, we are empowered to die to sin and live to righteousness, according to the pattern of Christ's righteous life. In this life we will never fully live according to the righteousness of our Shepherd Christ Jesus. But healed by the Shepherd's wounds, being mindful of God, entrusting ourselves to the power of His love, by the word and through the working of the Holy Spirit, let us begin. In Jesus' Name. Amen