

“We Are Blessed”

1 Peter 3:13-22

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

The underlying theme of Peter’s First Epistle is suffering. In six different places he gives counseling on suffering, and suffering is the major theme from here in the middle of chapter three all the way through the middle of chapter five.

Earlier in chapter three, Peter tells us that we are all to have “unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.” Essentially, strive for righteousness and you are blessed.

Keep the Law and you will be blessed. I say that with the understanding that, as we read in Bible class on Wednesday from Luther’s Large Catechism, “we will never manage to avoid flaws and missteps.” We all continually fall short of the demands of the Law. Yet, we recognize that when we live in closer proximity to where God desires us to be, our lives are blessed.

That doesn’t carry with it any guarantee that our lives will be easy, comfortable, or free from pain and suffering. The promise is that in striving to live in a manner pleasing to God, our lives will inevitably be blessed, because striving to live in such a manner will demand that we engage in holy things (God’s Word

and Sacrament in particular) and therefore we are blessed with forgiveness, the promise of eternal life, confidence in our salvation.

Now we hear Peter tell us, “if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed.” Strive to keep the Law and you will be blessed. Strive to keep the Law and you will be persecuted. In Mark 10 Jesus promises His disciples two things: “persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mk. 10:30).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs in the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Mt. 5:10-12).

So if you receive blessings as a child of God clothed in the righteousness of Christ as you return thanks to the Lord by striving to do what is according to His will, you are blessed. If you are persecuted for righteousness sake, and people hate you and revile you and speak all kinds of evil against you, you are blessed.

This is one of those verses of the Bible that we should, as Luther would say, “inscribe in gold upon our heart.” Even if we should suffer for righteousness sake, we are blessed. When we suffer for being a Christian, for being a baptized child of God standing out and against this fallen world, we are to rejoice in it.

There is a theme that runs through the Psalms. It is a rhetorical question: How long will they turn my glory into my shame. That is the way in which Scripture captures the essence of the suffering, persecuted child of God. What is our glory? It is certainly not our own works or our deeds. Our chief glory is, first and foremost, our Baptism. Our glory is that we are called by our Lord to be Christians.

What is the defining mark of your humanity? I have the blood of Jesus; I have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, and my sins are forgiven. Yet, the unbelieving world wants us to be ashamed of our faith. They want to make our glory to be our shame.

And because we know that there may be repercussions from friends, maybe family or co-workers when we wear our faith on our sleeve and publicly glory in the joy of the Gospel more than they think we should. We often slink back. We say we are a Christian, but quietly. We are told not to talk about religion in public, especially in certain circles as that brings up the real possibility of conversation which requires apologetics. Not an apology for our faith; we are not ashamed; but apologetics. A defense of our faith.

Like many things that should not be, we should not be made to see our glory turned to shame. Peter tells us that if “you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”

I know what you are saying, “But pastor, it’s easy for you to wear your faith on your sleeve at work.” I prefer to wear it on my collar, but that is whole other issue. But seriously, we gather together (at least in normal times) and during the Easter season, we boldly announce “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! I’m not saying that you should greet everyone on the street with a big old “Christ is risen!!” It would certainly be a sign that you are not ashamed of the Gospel. However, it would also be an unbelievably ineffective way to share the Gospel with those who do not yet have that same joy.

Peter says, “Do it with gentleness and respect.” Sarcasm and snarky remarks must be used sparingly and judiciously – greatly depending on the

audience. Mocking and offending someone before you try to win them over is counterproductive. Or simply telling all who are outside the church that they are going to burn in hell if they don't change their ways is not doing this "with gentleness and respect." This why arguing on Twitter or Facebook is such a fool's errand. No minds have ever been changed by those who mock and knock down "straw-man" arguments that they put forth about those on the opposite side of issues.

The same is true in regard to Christ. There needs to be a depth to your faith and a willingness to share that depth. At the same time, we are to have the faith of a little child. This why C.F.W Walther says that properly balancing Law and Gospel "is the highest art for the Christian in general and the theologian in particular." Being a Christian is not a journey down the broad and easy road, as Jesus says. It is a narrow, rugged passage, but is it definitely worth the journey. We will not see the fullness of what the end of that journey holds for us until the resurrection, so we glory in our salvation and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus knowing that so long as we are near our Good Shepherd, we will never be put to shame.

And out of love for our neighbor, we remain always prepared to make a defense of our faith to anyone who asks us for the reason for the hope that is in us. Amen.

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.