

Reality Check

7th Sun. of Easter – 05/17/26 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11 Pastor Keith Besel

5:10, [Peter says in the original Greek,] **“Furthermore, the God of all grace; the One calling you all into His eternal glory in connection with Christ; as you have suffered a little while, He will Himself fully qualify, firm up, strengthen, and establish you.”**

Introduction

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ I think most of us have been taught and encouraged to always “Read the fine print; to know what you’re getting into before you sign the bottom line,” right?

→ Those are valuable words of caution for anyone entering into a contract, because many have been surprised by a contract after learning that something they didn’t know before had been written “in the fine print.”

→ Sadly, there are numerous popular preachers, around the world, who attract followers by assuring them that “true disciples” of Jesus will absolutely be blessed with good health, wealth, and security if only they believe. But later those same listeners’ faith and confidence in Jesus is shaken because they still experience suffering and trials.

✘ Many of those disappointed folks, once they examine Scripture more closely with faithful pastors or friends, come to realize that Jesus never promised such a thing. In fact, as the apostle Peter shows us today, Jesus said something quite different. The reality is that those who follow Christ, not only might, but they will suffer for the name of Jesus.

→ Yet, Peter assures us today, in the midst of those sufferings and trials, the reality of Easter prepares and equips us for this stark reality of discipleship.

I. Christian Discipleship is Suffering

✘ From the very beginning of His ministry, as Jesus called His first apostles, He was clear with them about what would happen to them when they followed Him. They would be reviled, persecuted, and evil things would be said about them because of their connection to Him.

→ Yet, Jesus told them in Matthew 5:11-12 to rejoice and be glad when those things happen, because their reward would be great in heaven. In Luke 12:11 He told the disciples they would even be handed over to authorities to be beaten and punished. And in John 15:18-19, Jesus said that they would be hated by the world.

→ He spoke as well of another kind of severe suffering for those who follow Him. Shortly after instituting the Lord’s Supper, Jesus told Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail” (Lk 22:31–32). Never did Jesus hide the reality of suffering for His name’s sake from any of His disciples. In fact, he was quite graphic in describing the details.

✘ But Jesus cared deeply for His followers. So He prepared His apostles for those times of suffering with encouragement and hope. As Jesus was in the Upper Room on the night when He was betrayed, he told them, “I have said these things to you to keep you from falling away.” And listen closely to what He said next: “But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes [that is, the persecutions] you may remember that I told them to you” (Jn. 16:1, 4). And right after He said these things, He told them that the time had come when they would scatter out of fear, leaving Him all alone. “Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with Me,” Jesus said, “I

have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace” (Jn. 16:32–33). Through it all, Jesus assured those first believers that He would continually pray for them (Lk. 22:32; Jn. 17).

→ This kind of straight talk about their future suffering, became very important to those apostles when they were later teaching others about Jesus. They may have had no clue about the reality of the suffering they would eventually endure, but the Holy Spirit ... He would bring Jesus’ words to their remembrance after He was raised from the dead (Jn. 2:22; 12:16), and those words from Jesus, at that time, gave them great strength when they began living out the reality of their great suffering, and even death, for the name of Jesus.

- ✘ You know this reality too, don’t you? Some of you have had to endure very difficult, even oppressive work environments because those around you did not approve of your faith in Jesus. Others have spent years in a difficult struggle within your own homes and families; enduring pressure not to obey the Third Commandment and attend worship every Sunday, or being told that your faith in Jesus shouldn’t be your highest and greatest priority and joy. Many of you have endured difficulty in school when your teachers have challenged your belief in the truth of what God’s Word says over against the man-made “truths” in some of your textbooks, or online or that others in society try to say that you must adhere to or else you will be disciplined.

→ Just as Jesus said John 16:33, “In the world you will have tribulation.” That is the stark reality for all who believe and trust in Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

II. Suffering Because of Christ Shows Our Need for Him

- ✘ And now, we see in Peter today, that the apostles continued this kind of frank talk about suffering for Jesus’ sake; even as a part of their catechetical instruction to the early Christian Church; especially as that suffering began to grow and become more obvious and wide-spread.

→ Peter tells us in the first verse of this letter that he is writing “to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet 1:1), that just as Jesus told the apostles that He wanted them to know that suffering was in store for them so that they would not fall from faith when it came, so Peter now echoes this reality check to the new Christians around him. You can hear how much he cares for these believers when he begins verse 12, calling them his “beloved.” “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.”

→ It’s as if Peter is telling us all, still today, “Be forewarned. When you are persecuted for following Jesus; when you are reviled, insulted, shunned, shut out, ridiculed, arrested, imprisoned, put to death, sifted as wheat by Satan through severe trials, do not be alarmed; don’t be surprised by it. There’s no need to ask God, “Why is this happening to me?”

- ✘ As Peter says in verse 4:16, There’s no reason to be “ashamed” or intimidated by it. Sure, this kind of suffering as a Christian is uncomfortable. It’s hot, like a “fiery trial” sent to test you, Peter writes.

→ That image speaks to when metals and ore are heated in the testing pot to find out deep down what their makeup really is. So it is that spiritual trials test us and then reveal deep down our true makeup. We hear of these fiery trials experienced by those believers in the Old Testament. For example, God said to Israel through the prophet Isaiah, “I have refined you...; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction” (Is. 48:10).

- ✘ Fiery trials do the same for you and me; showing us how truly weak and helpless we all are; how utterly dependent we are upon God’s grace and mercy; how much we need the prayers of Jesus like we see in our Gospel Reading today, so that we can endure it all.

→ You see, when we find ourselves in the midst of these trials, it’s then that we, in our faith, are often driven ever deeper into God’s Word and prayer. The more we crave God’s words of

comfort and hope in times of trial; the more we are drawn to receive Jesus' body and blood in Communion, the more likely we are to be able to actually "rejoice", as Peter says in 4:13, that we are privileged to "share Christ's sufferings" and experience "His glory" as He is revealing it to us at those times.

- ✘ As Jesus told the apostles, so we are reminded that we are not alone through these trials. That gives us a whole new perspective, so that we can confess as Peter encourages us to do in 4:14, "The Spirit of glory and God rests upon me. I am blessed when I am insulted because of my faith, for He has counted me worthy to suffer for His name."

→ This actually strengthens us as believers, because our souls are firmly entrusted to the care of our Creator. It helps us to go on in peace and do the good that He has called us to do. With Jesus at our side, we need not worry about suffering. Instead we "cast all of our anxieties on Jesus because He cares for us" (5:7). Our lives and our eternity; they are both secure in Jesus.

- ✘ But still, as Peter urges, we must remain watchful because we have an enemy, the devil, who wants nothing more than to rob us of our Easter joy and our faithfulness to Christ.

III. Christ's Resurrection Gives Hope in Our Suffering

- ✘ That's why Peter reminds us here to remain vigilant. This Christian life is no game of make-believe. Satan is very real. Martin Luther pointed out that this world is absolutely the realm of the devil, especially now that he has been kicked out of heaven at Jesus' ascension and cast down to earth. He said we would be wise to regard our Christian life as if we were staying in a hotel where every other guest is a robber, so that we diligently do whatever we can to protect ourselves and likely not get much sleep. In other words, we must be on our constant guard (see *Luther's Works* (AE) 30:140).

→ Peter's image of Satan prowling around like a lion is very fitting. If you've ever watched TV programs of lions in the wild, or even observed a yard cat, you know that they see their prey long before the prey is ever aware. The lion studies the movements and all of its surroundings. Then it stealthily creeps along the tall grass while the prey is unaware that it is even close. Then it springs out and sinks its teeth and claws into its victim, putting the death grip of its jaws around the throat.

- ✘ Not only does Peter tell us to "be watchful", but we must "resist" Satan when he tempts us, remaining "firm in our faith" (5:8-9). Just as Jesus confidently used the Word of God to refute and resist the devil during His temptations, so you and I must never give up; must never let go of God's word of truth for anything! No matter how pretty he/she may look or sound; or how convincing or intimidating those friends, co-workers, family or internet influencers may be; or how much you or I may selfishly want to have or do something that is against God's will – always remember – those temptations are from the devil, looking to "devour" your soul and drag you away from Jesus and straight into hell!

→ So, "[cast] all your anxieties on Jesus," Peter says, "because He cares for you" (5:7). Only Jesus is Lord of lords. He's the one who descended into hell during His time in the tomb to announce His resurrection victory to all, and He did it right under Satan's nose. No matter how terrible or difficult your trials and sufferings may become, Satan is never the one who is in control.

→ He wants you to think that he has won, just as he did with all of the lies and false accusations that sent Jesus to be crucified on the cross. But the reality is that no one took Jesus' life. He laid it down of His own will to be the perfect sacrifice for all sin. You see, what Satan intended for destruction, Jesus used for our salvation.

- ⌘ And He does the same still today for the salvation of your soul and mine. The trials and the suffering and the difficulties that the devil puts in our lives, they cannot win when we have Jesus, the Victor with us!
 - ➔ As Peter says in chapter 5:10, “The God of all grace; the One calling you all into His eternal glory in connection with Christ;” even “as you have suffered a little while, He will Himself fully qualify, firm up, strengthen, and establish you.”
 - ➔ I know that your suffering may not always feel like it has been just “a little while” as Peter says. But when you consider the length of this earthly life, even if it would end up being a hundred years, in comparison to our promised eternity with Jesus in the glories of heaven where He promises in Revelation 21:4 that “He will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away”, then this “little while” of suffering is much more bearable, isn’t it!
- ⌘ Those Greek verbs in 5:10, that I translated as “He will Himself fully qualify, firm up, strengthen, and establish you”, they are all in what is called a *future indicative* sense. That means we are to receive them as absolute promises from Jesus to us, through His servant Peter. They speak of His powerful and gracious work within us as His beloved and redeemed people, and they serve to intensify the assurance that Jesus alone is making us, through the trials that we face, even more able to undergo and endure the difficulties of this life, because He, Jesus, has established us firmly within His saving embrace of grace.

Conclusion

- ⌘ And one of the greatest things about Jesus bringing us into His family of faith is this: that, in this relationship, there is no fine print; no hidden surprises; no stipulations for us to be concerned about. Ours is a new reality in Jesus, always and only because, Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*
 - ➔ As Peter says in verse 11, “To Him be the dominion forever and ever.” Amen.