

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Easter - I Peter 2:13-25

¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

¹⁸ Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ 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. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 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. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

If you read yesterday's devotional, you might remember that the Shepherding Lord accompanies the psalmist and us through the valley of the shadow of death. I would rather skip that valley, go around on the sunny slopes of the hills of happiness and the broad plains of success. But my path does not lead that way. We hear Peter and honor those who are in authority, but sometimes that hurts.

Peter speaks to people who are being persecuted and asking the "why me?!" questions which naturally pop up when life gets gritty and tough. He has some interesting things to say about following the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Sometimes it means that we suffer for doing good. If we sin and are punished, that is justice. But if we do good, suffer for it, and endure, this is a "gracious" thing in God's sight. Why is it gracious? Because, when we suffer like that, we look a little like Jesus. That is the way he suffered. Our lives strangely look a little like his.

We were straying, you see, into a way of life which saw suffering only as the evil which had to be avoided at all costs, even if it meant compromising our humanity by lashing out, lying, or some other means. But now he has risen from the dead, the living body that was crucified so that we might be returned to that true Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. In being that Shepherd, he has redefined suffering for us. Peter never asks us to enjoy suffering. But he does ask us to think about it anew, as a vocation through which God has saved the world. It is not an occasion to lash out or compromise our faith. We won't need to put ourselves first and hoard the latest scarce commodity. We can entrust ourselves to the one who judges justly. He has holes in his hands and his feet, the marks of his death for our sins. We have no fear of that judgment but only a love which allows us to be patient and kind.

God be with you until we meet again. In Jesus' love and mercy, Pastor Wulf