



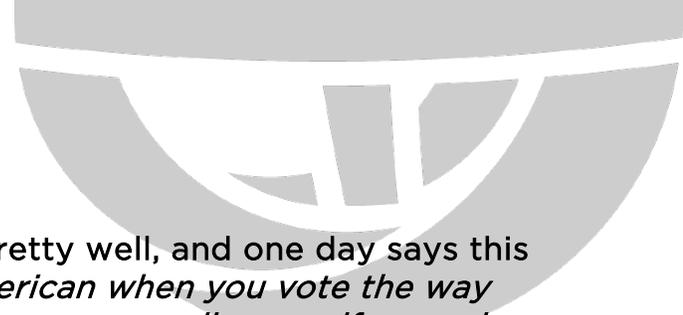
November 17, 2019
Sermon Series: Seeking Stability in a World of Change

Seeking Peace During Troubled Times
Pastor Vern Christopherson

Peter 3:8-22 NRSV

⁸Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰For “Those who desire life and desire to see good righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it. ¹²For the eyes of the Lord are on the who do evil.”

¹³Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, ¹⁵but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; ¹⁶yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil. ¹⁸For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water. ²¹And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of es us Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.



Suppose you have a friend who knows you pretty well, and one day says this to you: *How can you call yourself a good American when you vote the way you do?* Or maybe your friend says this: *How can you call yourself a good parent when your kids act the way they do?* Or maybe this: *How can you call yourself a good Christian when you make the choices you do?*

So, if your friend says something like this, how would you respond – Get your feelings hurt? Un-friend him or her on Facebook? Or maybe think up a mean-spirited comeback to try to even the score?

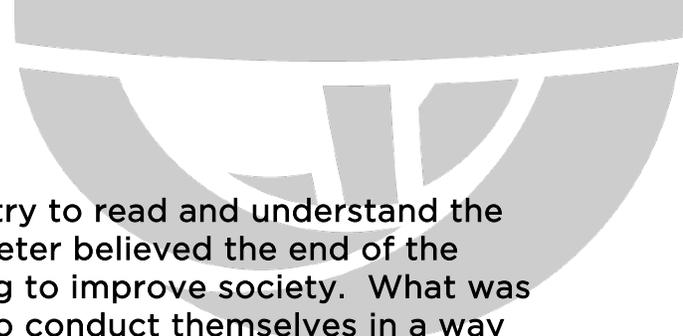
The Christians to whom 1 Peter was addressed were in a similar boat. They were the objects of lots of ridicule. Most of them were new believers. Their newfound faith in Jesus had turned their world upside down. Friends, neighbors, and sometimes even family members, had lots of mean-spirited things to say to them. In particular, they said: “How dare you abandon the gods of your ancestors and instead put your trust in a Jewish carpenter named Jesus!”

These new believers weren’t sure how to respond to the ridicule. 1 Peter was meant to guide them in any number of sticky situations. If you’ve been reading the letter at home, you’ve probably bumped into some of those sticky situations, and maybe even felt uncomfortable with the advice: “Slaves, obey your masters, even if at times they are harsh.” “Wives, accept the authority of your husbands, and don’t be so concerned about fixing yourselves up when you go out in public.” And here’s my favorite: “Husbands, show honor to your wives – you know – because they’re the weaker sex.”

What’s going on here? It comes down to this: these newborn believers are trying hard to be Christians in a non-Christian world. 1 Peter tells them: “Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but on the contrary, repay with a blessing.” It goes on: “Seek peace in this troubled world of ours. And here’s why it’s important: If you follow in the way of Jesus, others will notice, and they might get interested in Jesus too. And just as importantly: you’ll be reminded that Jesus is trustworthy and true, and he’s worth whatever trouble you are facing.”

Biblical passages like this can be tricky. Down through the ages, believers have chosen to apply them in very different ways. Some have used them to justify slavery. Others have used them to control their wives. And still others have used them to keep women in their proper place.





Please hear me: It's very important for us to try to read and understand the Bible in its original context. The author of 1 Peter believed the end of the world was near. He had no intention of trying to improve society. What was needed, he said, was for newborn believers to conduct themselves in a way that would draw others to the Christian faith.

Obviously, the world did not end in the first century. Thankfully, many of the issues they were facing are not the issues of today. Still, our world might be just as troubled as the world was back then.

We don't have to look very hard to find it: an ugly brawl at the end of an NFL game; another school shooting, this one in California; a hard-fought, and at times nasty, impeachment inquiry in Congress; and let's not forget, the occasional snippy comment from someone we thought was a friend.

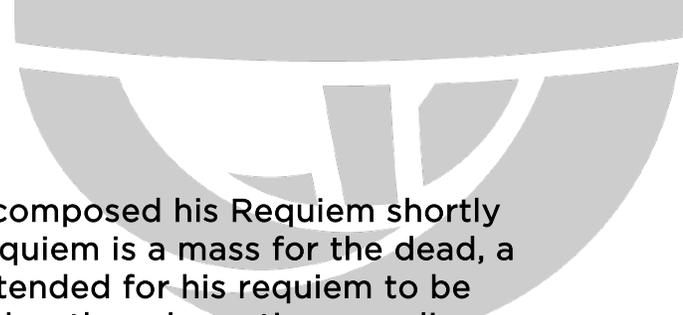
What does it mean for us to live as Christians amidst the troubles of our world? How about following the advice of 1 Peter: "Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but on the contrary, repay with a blessing"? I'm not saying this is easy. At times it might even feel naïve. But think about it: if we follow in the way of Jesus, others may notice our behavior and get interested in Jesus too. And, in the process, we may be reminded that Jesus is trustworthy and true, and he's worth whatever trouble we are facing.

Our passage from 1 Peter stretches us: "It's better to suffer for doing good," it says, "than to suffer for doing evil. Christ suffered too, the righteous for the unrighteous." The author describes Christ's actions between Good Friday and Easter. This is too complicated to discuss at length, but notice that this is where we get the phrase in the Apostles' Creed, "He descended to the dead."

Why did Christ go there? According to 1 Peter, Christ descended to the dead to proclaim life and hope to those who had died before he came; Christ descended to demonstrate that his redeeming work is cosmic in scope; Christ descended to show there is no limit to the love of God. In fact, there's room in God's embrace even for those from the days of Noah who were utterly incorrigible. Here's the truth, says 1 Peter: "Christ is God's saving action once and for all. No one - past, present, or future - is outside the scope of God's love."

Do you believe that? I want to, but I'll admit, it's a lot to take in. How different would our lives be if we lived with the conviction that no one is outside of God's love. How different would our world be if we resolved not to repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but instead to repay with a blessing?





John Rutter was trying to be a blessing. He composed his Requiem shortly after his father's death. Just a reminder: a requiem is a mass for the dead, a way to honor and remember them. Rutter intended for his requiem to be intimate rather than grand, contemplative rather than dramatic, consoling rather than grim. After Rutter finished his work, his fame spread quickly. His life seemed practically perfect. But of course, there is no such thing. Shortly afterward, Rutter was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome. And a few years later, his son was killed in a car accident. It was yet another sad reminder that we live in a world full of trouble. And most days we need all the help we can get.

So, my friends, from where does your help come? Hopefully from the same place as those new believers facing ridicule in 1 Peter. Hopefully from the same place as John Rutter. That is, from the Christ who is trustworthy and true, the Christ who shows that none of us is outside the scope of God's love.

Rutter was inspired by Psalm 23: "The Lord is our shepherd. His lovingkindness shall follow us all the days of our lives: and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Amen.

