

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 9, 2012

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 237, 301:1-2, 245, 216, 244.

Lessons: Genesis 6:1-22, Romans 5:1-11, John 20:1-8.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 3:17-22

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We ended last week's sermon with this Word of God: *"It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."* Then Peter shows us someone who suffered for doing good. That one is Jesus Christ, our Savior.

The opinion of the world may be that a person should avoid suffering at any cost, by any means. But the Lord's view in the matter is that suffering evil is sometimes necessary and therefore to be endured. One thing is certain, namely, that a Christian will not object to the will of the Lord if He permits suffering to strike His children. While it would be terrible for Christians to be suffering as a punishment for evil-doing, it is no more than they may expect to be suffering for doing well, for it is the way of the world to be hostile to the children of God and to persecute them in every possible way. It is a part of the Christians' calling as long as they are living in the midst of unbelievers. After all, Christ himself suffered unjustly, for he himself was sinless. But

THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST IS AN ASSURANCE TO THOSE WHO SUFFER

- 1. Christ died for sins, once for all, and was raised from the dead.**
- 2. He descended into hell to proclaim his victory.**
- 3. Baptism is further assurance of our salvation.**
- 4. Christ is glorified at God's right hand with all power and glory.**

Of course, Christ is more than just another example for us. He suffered to redeem us from our sins, from death, from the power of the devil. The example of Christ should serve for encouragement. For Christ also died once for sins, the Just one for the unjust, that He might bring mankind to God. The example of Christ is of such great value to Christians because He suffered and died, although he was altogether innocent, the Sinless One having the sins of all men piled upon Him, the Just and Holy One taking the place of the unjust ones, all sinners. Thus Christ's one death atoned for the transgressions of all men. His vicarious suffering reconciled all men to God the Father. By this act He brought us to God, and made it possible for us to become partakers of the glory of God. Our bodies, by virtue of the glorification of Christ, will be made like unto His glorified body, and we shall see God face to face on judgment day.

Christ's successful work and triumphant coronation at God's right hand in heaven provide the basis for hope, confidence, and assurance in our lives. The center of hope and joy for any Christian is the gospel. The gospel is presented here as forcefully as anywhere in the Scriptures.

As a reason why suffering for doing good is better than suffering for doing evil, Peter brings in the example of Christ, who himself suffered for doing good.

In suffering this way the Christian is identifying with Christ and he or she, according to Peter, will also be identified with the resurrection of Christ.

First, Christ's suffering was unjust. Christ suffered innocently, and not just innocently, but on behalf of the sins of others – the righteous on behalf of the unrighteous. Especially in Isaiah 53:11 the servant is spoken of as righteous. In that passage, Christ's substitutionary death for those who deserve death comes across clearly.

Secondly, the purpose of the suffering of Christ was to lead you to God. Peter pictures the Christian life as closely, actively following Jesus.

The death of Christ did not destroy him, just as death will not destroy the Christian sufferer. Peter contrasts the death of Christ with his resurrection. Christ was made alive, rising from the dead.

Look at the word pictures God uses for our redemption:

“Christ died for sins” – these words acknowledge our evil, our problem, our guilt, but for the solution they point to what someone else has done for us, on our behalf, in our place. It reminds us that our need is great, but that the solution is even greater: the death of the God-man Jesus Christ.

“Once for all” – these words proclaim the seriousness and finality of Christ’s words on the cross. The work of redeeming mankind really is finished. Although we sin repeatedly in our lives, Christ’s one act of atonement covers all sin of all people.

“The righteous for the unrighteous” – this is the heart of the Christian gospel, that a substitution was made. The Father loaded the blame for the sins of the world upon a righteous substitute and then had him executed in our place. The severity of the punishment upon Jesus shows at the same time the greatness of God’s mercy upon us who believe it.

“To bring you to God” – we cannot lift ourselves up to God. Christ has lifted us up to God.

Christ suffered once. Sins are paid for. You don’t have to try to earn your own salvation. You don’t have to pay for your own sins.

Peter in this section uses the name “Christ”, meaning “the anointed one”, “the messiah”. Here we see Christ’s humiliation and exaltation just as we confess it in the Apostolic Creed. Of course, the creed was drawn from the teachings of Scripture. Christ was put to death in the body, made alive, went and preached to the spirits in prison – hell – was raised, has gone into heaven, and is sitting at God’s right hand, ruling over everything in all creation, including all angels. If all these things are true, then our earthly sufferings really don’t matter. If Christ is on the throne of heaven, it doesn’t really matter who is on the throne in Rome – in Peter’s time – or who is sitting and ruling anywhere on earth – in our time. If Christ is resurrected and alive, it doesn’t really matter if earthly death claims the lives of the Saints – temporarily.

The descent into hell is taught clearly here in Scripture. We see that it was not part of Christ’s suffering. He truly did indeed experience the horror and desolation of hell, but that happened before he died. His descent into hell was to proclaim his victory to the spirits in the eternal prison of hell – both human and demonic spirits – whose torments had begun. Jesus did what victorious generals often do – go to the enemy’s capital and raise the flag of the one who conquered them. Jesus’ preaching was not for the purpose of giving the damned a second chance at repentance, but simply to proclaim his victory.

One example of the types of rebellious spirit found in the spirit prison – hell – is that of the unbelievers during the first centuries of Noah’s life. Our Old Testament lesson tells that history. In spite of God’s patience and hope for their repentance, he saw that every inclination of man’s heart was only evil all the time. Their disobedience to his Word and will aroused his angry judgment so intensely that he drowned every living creature on the face of the earth except for those in the Ark.

And speaking of the Ark, that led Peter into another discussion, which is the role of baptism in God’s great saving plan. The very waters that were destroying the earth were in a way saving Noah and his family, since they lifted up his great boat and thus he and his family were spared the terrible destruction by flood that was taking place on the surface of the earth. Since the great aquifers of the deep were all blasting to the surface at once and tearing up the land, it was actually much safer to be in a boat riding on top of all that water. Peter says that the saving floodwater **“symbolizes baptism that now saves you also.”** The floodwaters actually preserved Noah and were not just symbolic. Baptism does not merely give a picture of our salvation but actually gives us salvation by connecting us with the death and resurrection of Christ. Its value is not in giving us a clean skin by removing dirt but in giving us a clean conscience by removing the dirt and filth of sin.

‘Baptism now saves you’ is Peter’s point and baptism saves through the resurrection of Jesus. While baptism is a washing with water, it is not this outward washing which saves us. The water does not have a magical quality, and neither does the outward ritual. God gives us **“the pledge of a good conscience toward”** himself.

Christ suffered once for sins, one righteous one in place of many unrighteous ones – all mankind. He was put to death but was later made alive. Any other sacrificial victims remain dead, but not Christ. Only of Christ can it be said that he leads us to God.

How was Christ brought to life? We read he was ***“made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison.”*** Spirit and body, which had been separated in death, were reunited in his being made alive. Peter does not move directly to the resurrection. He shows the important – the essential – fact that Jesus descended into hell to proclaim his victory.

In the tomb, the linen wrappings were suddenly empty and lay flat, the body having miraculously gone out of them, as you heard in our gospel lesson. Those empty grave clothes are evidence of what had occurred. In that instant, but timelessly, Christ in his human body and spirit descended to hell and did what Peter relates. How the details of all this occurred is not clear to our human minds. The risk is that we ask many useless questions where acts that take place in eternity are concerned. We are limited by our human thoughts. Our minds are chained to both time and space as we know them here on earth in our thinking and in our language. We must simply accept and believe what God tells us in his Word, with more knowledge to be revealed to us in eternity in heaven.

Both the human nature and the divine nature of Christ descended into hell.

Peter presents the facts here in the order of the Apostles Creed: suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. Peter mentions Jesus returned to judgment later in this letter.

The spirits of Noah’s time are used as an example of everyone in hell. In Noah’s day, the world had warning from God for 120 years as Noah was building the ark and proclaiming God’s warnings. They didn’t know it would be 120 years, but they had the warning. That the world had such warning from God still didn’t save them.

Like Noah, Christians are a small, persecuted minority surrounded by a majority that is disobedience to God and controlled by disobedient spirits

Christ’s triumphant proclamation reminds Christians that they will be the minority just as Noah and his family were, which is surely comforting in a time of suffering.

Jesus Christ now sits in the place of power. ***“Having gone into heaven,”*** Peter says. Jesus rose from the dead and he is not on earth. He ascended into heaven. This was plainly prophesied in Psalm 110:1 where David, the master or “Lord” of the Israelites wrote by inspiration: ***“The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”*** (When we see the word LORD, with four capital letters, that refers to God, translating the Hebrew word used for “JEHOVAH”, which means “Lord”.) Paul, too, emphasizes that fact in Romans 8:34: ***“Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”***

With all that Christ did laid out in front of them, the readers will recognize themselves as blessed. They will not be afraid of men, or be shaken. They will sanctify the Lord Christ in their hearts and will be ready to answer men at any time regarding their hope, always keeping a good conscience.

Jesus now rules in divine glory and majesty over heaven, earth, and hell, with all God’s holy angels being his servants in his ruling. What a comfort this is to us, who now suffer for Christ on earth! Never forget that ***“Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”*** Amen.