

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, September 30, 2012

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Lessons: Zechariah 13:7-9, 1 Peter 1:1-9, Matthew 5: 10-13.
Sermon Text: 1 Peter 4:12-13.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In general, how do people feel if something bad comes upon them? And especially, how do we feel if we are persecuted – for any reason? How do we feel if a "painful trial" or a "fiery trial" comes upon us? No one likes suffering or persecution. But suffering because of what they believe and confess should not surprise Christians. Suffering can be an occasion for the testing of faith and for sharing in Christ's sufferings and an occasion for rejoicing. And what should be the proper response to suffering for Christ? Praise and glorifying of God!

The Word of God in front of us today tells us that believers in Jesus Christ in the past have suffered, and believers will continue to suffer "bad things" just because they are believers and confess their faith in Jesus Christ. When will this happen to you? How will this happen to you? I don't know. I cannot predict the future. But the Word of God tells us that

BELEIVERS SUFFER FOR THEIR FAITH

1. **Do not be surprised at such trials,**
2. **But "rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ,**
3. **So that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."**

This is not the first time Peter addresses the sufferings of believers in Jesus Christ. As you heard in our Epistle lesson, he acknowledged that the believers in Asia Minor to whom he is writing *"may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials."* (1 Peter 1:6) He even gives a reason: *"These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."* (1 Peter 1:7) This is the same way he addressed his readers in chapter 2: *"Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."* (1 Peter 2:11-12) He also wrote in 1 Peter 3:14: *"But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."* John wrote in 1 John 3:13: *"Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you."* Now Peter comes back to that idea again, speaking of *"the painful trial you are suffering."* The King James Version calls it *"the fiery trial which is to try you."* When a writer, especially a writer of the inspired Word of God repeats something, it is important, and worth paying attention to. Peter here begins a new section of this letter to suffering Christians, having used the word *"amen"* to end the previous verse. Did you notice how Peter starts this verse and this section of the letter? *"Dear friends,"* literally *"Dearly beloved"* as in the King James Version. Dearly beloved friends, do not feel as if something strange is happening to you. He purposely addresses his readers as intimate friends, in order to make his words all the more impressive. These are the people who are despised by the world, yet they are beloved friends to Peter and to all fellow believers. What a remarkable way to think of fellow confessors of Christ! *"Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you."* They should not be surprised; they should not look upon it as unusual or strange that they were just then passing through ordeals

which tried them severely. Whatever they were suffering was certainly unpleasant for them in this life. In reality these experiences were not foreign or strange to them, but God permitted them to suffer these things for the testing and strengthening of their faith. The fact that Peter frequently repeats words of advice and comfort to Christians, considered as sufferers, in every chapter of this letter shows that the greatest danger these new converts were facing arose from persecutions. Because they embraced Christianity they were exposed to great persecution. The good behavior of Christians under sufferings is the most difficult part of their calling, but it is really necessary both for the honor of Christ and ultimately for their own rejoicing. Peter here points his hearers to the need for patience under sufferings. God makes it clear in Peter's letter that such trials and tests, although they be difficult to bear, are designed only to test Christians and not to destroy them. They come upon Christians, even upon us today, to test their sincerity, strength, patience, and trust in God. Peter goes on: ***"But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."*** In the measure in which you are partakers of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice, in order that also when God reveals His glory you may rejoice with extreme happiness. The sufferings of the Christians which come upon them as Christians are the same sufferings which struck their Lord and Master Jesus Christ. He was hated and persecuted by the children of the world. Why should Christians, true followers of Jesus Christ expect anything different? Peter knew what he was talking about. Although he was one who ran away when Jesus was taken captive in Gethsemane, he later rejoiced because he had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for Jesus. Peter, together with John, had healed a man who had been lame from birth, and Peter also preached Jesus Christ publicly. We read in Acts 4:1-3: ***"The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day."*** Peter and John were released and told not to preach about Jesus Christ.

But you know what? They did, continuing to tell people about the only Savior from sin. Later we read that the apostles, probably including Peter and John, were called before the Sanhedrin, the high council of the Jews, and flogged and told not to speak in the name of Jesus. Jesus was flogged, Peter was flogged, and no doubt many Christians, perhaps including those to whom Peter wrote this letter were flogged, beaten, and even executed. Then we read in Acts 5:41: ***"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."***

By the time Peter was writing this letter, Christianity was viewed as a dangerous and subversive movement. The Roman emperor Nero, who ruled from 54-68 A.D., chose to blame the Christians in Rome for a terrible fire that had destroyed part of the city in July, 64. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, hundreds of Christians were arrested, convicted for anti-social beliefs, covered in the skins of wild animals, and torn to death by dogs; others were crucified, coated with pitch, and set on fire, so when darkness fell, they burned like torches in the night. Such persecutions spread throughout the Roman empire. So we can see in this way that Christians were also partakers of Christ's sufferings. Now we must remember that the sufferings of Jesus Christ paid fully for all the sins of all mankind, and so suffering of Christians even today is not to pay for their sins.

The word used for ***"painful trial"*** or ***"fiery trial"*** is the picture of raw ore or an impure valuable metal such as gold or silver being heated and melted in the fire to purify it and get rid of all slag or dross. Christians ought to rejoice under their sufferings. Such sufferings are of the same kind that Christ suffered. They let us identify with him. Jesus, although he was sinless, suffered for sin while he was on earth, and identifies with our infirmities; and, if we be partakers of his sufferings, we shall also be make partakers of his glory, and shall meet him with exceeding joy at his great appearing when he comes to judge his enemies, and to crown his faithful servants. Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-12: ***"God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey — that is, hearken to — the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that***

our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." Persecution is not something "*strange*" or foreign to believers' existence as Christians. What is happening is right in line with Christ's predictions, as you heard in our gospel lesson. They are to accept persecution and look forward to the glory that will come because Jesus redeemed them from their sins and the Holy Spirit has worked faith in them. Many of Peter's readers, being Gentile converts, had no experience of being part of a persecuted minority. They had been perfectly at home in their city before learning of Jesus Christ, hearing the gospel, and being converted by the work of the Holy Spirit. Christians have been forewarned of the persecutions and trials they will face in this world. Christ himself endured them. Christians ought not only to be patient, but to rejoice in their hardest, most difficult sufferings for Christ. Accepting such persecutions and trials promotes the gospel and prepares believers for glory. Those who rejoice in their sufferings for Christ shall eternally triumph and rejoice with him in glory. Christians should have this feeling that their inner happiness must increase to the very point of exultation as their sufferings increase, the conclusion being reached on the day when their Lord will be revealed in glory and their everlasting enjoyment of His glory in heaven will begin. Can't you just visualize yourself and all Christians jumping and pumping your fists in a triumphant "Yes", showing that you have won the entire game, set, match, the whole series? This future glory was the secret of the patience, of the steadfastness, of the endurance of the martyrs. This was the power which sustained them in the midst of the most cruel and inhuman sufferings, their joy in the Lord, their certainty that they would become partakers of His glory on the last day. This is the kind of rejoicing — the very same word — used in our gospel lesson. This is the same rejoicing Mary spoke of in her Magnificat upon learning that she would bear the Savior of all mankind. In this way Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day. The same word is used in Acts 2:26 of David rejoicing in the Savior. This is the rejoicing of the jailer at Philippi who was saved by the Word of God and baptism. This is the rejoicing Peter spoke of that believers are born "*into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*" (1 Peter 1:4-6) Peter also assures believers: "*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.*" (1 Peter 1:8) This is the kind of rejoicing which is even written of in Revelation 19:5-6 when all believers will rejoice at the throne of God in heaven. "*Then a voice came from the throne, saying: 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!' Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: 'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.'*" Yes, we and all who believe in Jesus as our Savior from all our sins suffer difficult trials on earth. But we can rejoice in such persecutions because we know the joy that is waiting for us in heaven. Amen.