

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity, October 7, 2012**

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

Hymns 425,393:6,520:1-7, 346:1-4,346:5-6.

Lessons: Psalm 37:1-13 Romans 8:16-28, John 15:26-16:15.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 4:14-19.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last week we talked about persecution and the glory that is waiting for us. One Christian writer said “The worst persecution can be borne with joy when the eye is fixed on the revelation of Christ’s glory and the unbounded joy that awaits the faithful.” Many early Christians suffered terribly for their faith. The attitude they took towards persecution was remarkable. They reasoned that since their Lord had suffered, they were privileged to experience what He had experienced. Peter goes on this week and emphasizes that we should not suffer as a wicked person. He writes about

**SUFFERING AS A CHRISTIAN**

- 1. If you are insulted because you are a Christian, do not be ashamed.**
- 2. If you suffer as a Christian, “*praise God that you bear the name*”.**
- 3. God’s judgment is coming quickly!**
- 4. Through all sufferings, the believer entrusts himself to God.**

From our enemies come insults, from the Holy Spirit comes the glory that makes us blessed. These two are opposites. Peter’s readers were being insulted, reviled, reproached, taunted and persecuted just because they confessed to be Christians or because they lived Christian, God-pleasing lives. Peter had just written that “*they heap abuse on you.*” (1 Peter 4:4) Perhaps you, too, can identify with them because of that.

Peter presents a paradox here, that is, a seeming contradiction. He says: if you are insulted for the name of Christ, happy are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God Himself is resting upon you. With them – the ones who insult, who reproach, who persecute you – God is blasphemed, but with you he is glorified. The fate of believers in this world is that they are denounced and persecuted because they bear the name of Christ, because they belong to Him. This scorn and contempt of the world is often more difficult to bear than outright oppression and persecution. The Christians are ostracized and regarded as narrow-minded fools, whose seeming low state of intelligence leads men who are learned in the ways of the world to mock them not associate with them.

Last week we talked about how Jesus was treated the same way – and even worse. Thus it is that because of their association with Christ believers are outcasts, even from their previous social groups. But that is not their true state, for Peter tells them they are blessed. Now we see what the Holy Spirit does for the Christians who are so blasphemed and reproached. Christians are blessed in the sight of God.

This blessing consists of the fact that “*the Spirit of glory and of God*” rests upon them. Jesus promised this in Matthew 5:10 “*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”

Thus those suffering for Christ even now experience through the Spirit the glory they are promised in the future. Their very suffering is a sign that the reputation – the glory – of God is seen in them, that his Spirit rests upon them. They can really consider themselves blessed. They have peace with God, and as a result, peace in their consciences and hearts.

The Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God Himself, has made His dwelling with them. This Spirit had been promised by the Lord – for example, in our Gospel lesson – as the great Comforter, who was to give the

disciples that help which they needed against the enmity and hatred of the world. The Spirit, whom we have received by faith, in Baptism, rests upon us like a protecting hand, which, even here on earth reduces to some degree, the fierceness of tribulation. In the Word of God, God is always increasing the assurance of believers about their eventual eternal possession of the heavenly glory God has promised them. And the Holy Spirit is also called here the Spirit of the Father. He knows the heart and mind of the Father. He always assures Christians that God is still on their side.

Instead of hanging our heads, we should lift them up to Christ with radiant faces. The Holy Spirit rests on you – you need to have that a lot more than you need approval and compliments from God's enemies. We remember Stephen just before he was stoned to death: ***"But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'"*** Acts 7:55-56 Even persecution can be a reason for praise, as it was even in Peter's own life, and in the life of Stephen, called the first martyr. Such abuse and persecution is even strong evidence that God's Spirit rests upon us. The Holy Spirit brings us the name of Christ, that is, all that God has revealed about Christ, for he caused the Holy Scriptures to be written down word for word as God wanted them. The Spirit bestows God's glory upon us and thus makes us blessed. He IS God, and is sent by God.

So, if and when you suffer as a Christian, because you are a Christian, do not be ashamed but glorify God in connection with the name of Jesus

But Peter gives a warning about suffering because you are an evildoer. Only those who suffer because they are Christians can consider themselves blessed. No Christian should even consider risking suffering as a common criminal, unless the accusation is a cover-up for the real accusation of being a Christian, as often happens. Peter mentions two specific categories of criminals, murderer and thief. Then he adds the summary term 'criminal' to cover other types of evil activity which is condemned even by man's laws. These are traditional examples of crimes which everyone considers evil. If anyone calling himself a Christian and belonging to the Christian community – yes, a church member – should become guilty of actual wrong-doing and commits some such crime while professing to be a Christian, he or she deserves all the shame which the governmental prosecution brings upon him by making him suffer the severity of the law even as he disgraces the name of Christ. Note that this does not rule out repentance and the assurance of forgiveness, but emphasizes how the name of Christ can be blasphemed in the world.

But then we have a fourth term, '**meddler**', very appropriately translated "**busybody in other men's matters**" in the King James Version. This means one who meddles or pries into things that do not concern him, a person who tries to supervise what is the affair of others. Thus God is telling us not to put our noses or worse into situations in which they ought not to be involved. Examples include interfering in the affairs of another family or person, however well meaning it might be. No Christian should disgrace Christ by being guilty of such things. Such behavior will not only cause bitterness, but will usually frustrate even the good intentions which such a meddler may have had. Realize, of course, that this does not prevent Christians from admonishing one another.

No believer should be ashamed of being accused of being a Christian. It is a blessed advantage which the Christians have from their sufferings in the world, and they are brought into closer communion with their heavenly Father with every new day, praising the Holy Spirit as their Comforter and Friend, even though God be blasphemed by the children of the world. Instead of feeling shame, Christians should hold their heads high for they can glorify God and bring honor to God. They will glorify God simply by properly bearing the name Christian. Their willingness to suffer in the fact that their allegiance to Christ and his lifestyle is the only accusation that can properly be brought against them – as opposed to murderer or thief or some other criminal charge – will bring honor, not to themselves or to their cause, but to God himself. Surely that is reason enough to suffer with joy. The Christian will in no way seek his own glory in suffering. His attitude will rather be such as to give all glory and honor to God alone.

Peter goes on: ***"For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, 'If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?'"*** It is time for God's final judgment to begin.

God's judgment in the church serves to purify his church. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:31-32: ***"But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world."*** Peter writes that the final judgment is beginning even now in the church, God's house, a judgment that will purify it. God's intention is to instruct and train the church.

Believers are, in a sense, God's mouthpieces. In this sense we could say that the verdict comes from us, from the house of God. We proclaim law and proclaim gospel. We announce God's judgments upon unbelievers, who refuse to believe in God's law and his Gospel. This judgment will also be punishment for the crimes these unbelievers are committing against God's house, his holy church. We proclaim that judgment along with the opportunity to believe the gospel and be saved. ***"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,"*** as we read in Hebrews 10:31.

If God is hard on Christians how severe indeed will he be with those who reject him! The idea is this: If even Christians must be judged, what fate must await unbelievers who will be punished for their sins? For if God is this hard with the church how much harder will it be with those who do not obey the gospel of God, meaning do not believe and cling to it and confidently trust its saving promises.

Those who refused to believe the Gospel will miss the salvation of Christ, and will go away into everlasting destruction.

What for the Christians is a judgment of refining, to test and purify their faith, what they accept as a beneficial chastisement at the hands of God, will be a punishment of wrath unto everlasting damnation for the unbelievers. But this fact should not frighten Christians. Those who are disobedient are the people who have heard and rejected the gospel. This verdict is only for those who deserve it because of their treatment of God's gospel. Those who have failed to submit to the demands of the Gospel will be excluded from fellowship with God and not take part in the coming salvation. They will not enjoy the blessings of heaven.

Our text draws to a close: ***"So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."*** This is how the Christian should live. That such suffering is in accord with God's will has been a recurring theme of this letter. Persecution does not mean that the world is out of control, but that God is working out his plan in their lives. What it means to do good simply means doing those things which God views as good.

The attitude of the Christian in all of life is one of trust. Following Christ, who as his last words said before dying: ***"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"*** Luke 23:46 (King James Version), believers are to commit themselves to God, for he is the faithful Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter. He has not changed nor will he change and can therefore be trusted. This is the God in whom one is to rest, even though physically threatened while here on earth.

Here on earth believers tend to feel that suffering indicates God has forsaken them. Peter teaches us God is true to Himself, to His people, and to His promises. Suffering simply calls us to new commitment to Him and to His way of living. A willingness to do God's will, whatever the cost, is the only ultimate way to face the problem of unexplained suffering. That will is not something new. It is the Creator's eternal purpose.

Peter concludes: let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to Him, to the faithful Creator and spend their lives in doing good, in doing what is pleasing to God. Although the last time of suffering has begun for the Christians, all those who are suffering in conformity with the will of the Lord should not despair, but should entrust their souls into God's care, into the protection of the Lord. They know that He will not tempt them above that they are able. Believers are then diligent in the exercise of good works. God who created us is surely able also to keep us safely to the end. That is our comfort in life and in death.

So we quote the divinely inspired Words of Peter himself again: ***"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing."*** 1 Peter 3:9 We are also reminded of the words of the Psalmist: ***"Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass."*** Psalm 37:5 (King James Version)

May we daily commit ourselves unto God's almighty, eternal care. Amen.