

**Prayer of the Day:**

O Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Good Shepherd who laid down your life for the sheep. Lead us now to the still waters of your life-giving Word that we may abide in your Father's house forevermore; for you live and reign with him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**Verse of the Day:**

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Alleluia. (John 10:14)

**Sermon Text:**

Humor me for a moment this morning and imagine a snow-covered field. (It's May and the weather is warming up so I think it's safe to do so this morning.) Now imagine a Father and his young son trudging through that snow that goes just up to the top of dad's boot. It doesn't take long before the child behind begins to complain, "It's hard to walk in the snow and I'm getting tired daddy." They've barely left the house, so dad looks back at his son and says, "Try walking in my footsteps for a while. Maybe that will be easier."

In our lesson today, we have a similar picture used by the Apostle Peter, although I don't know that they get snow in that area of the world. He tells the Christians scattered throughout Turkey and with that Spirit inspired pen, all of us, *<sup>19</sup> For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. <sup>20</sup> But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. <sup>21</sup> To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

Peter says, "it is commendable." That is, it is a praiseworthy thing. It would even be acceptable to have translated, "It is a gift or grace" if a Christian bears up under the pain (or excessive sorrow) of unjust suffering. I don't think we would argue with that statement made by Peter and yet it's a whole lot easier said than done, isn't it? We are beginning to feel the weight of these words more and more in our world today but rather than dive into all of that yet again, let's note the distinction that Peter makes.

While it is good, right and salutary to bear up under the pain of unjust suffering, it is not to our credit when we suffer for doing what is actually wrong. It seems like a pretty simple statement but it has some pretty profound applications. Why are we suffering? Why are you

**TEXT: 1 Peter 2:19-25**

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suffering today? Why am I suffering today? On this Good Shepherd Sunday is it because I am a spotless lamb of the Good Shepherd or is it because I am more often a wayward sheep?

My conscience is easily pricked and my blood easily flows so as soon as the distinction was made my brain immediately opened the file of sin which Peter points out here. Because of all of it, so often the suffering I endure is not really suffering at all but the self-inflicted wounds and well deserved consequences of sin which rages within and without. Still, there are also those times (fewer than I think mind you) that I truly suffered an injustice. But here I find it difficult to say I endured it. For in such a situation I raised my voice to the heavens decrying God for His unjust ways and while demanding that He get this fixed, the way I wanted it done. Call it a grace and a blessing? I probably called it something else.

Then I look ahead again to the pace setter of this particular portion of life, well to any portion of life and I see Him. Jesus, praying for enemies, enduring opposition, silent in the face of those who false accuse Him, praying for their forgiveness even as those who would murder Him mock Him in His pain and agony. *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.* It's awe-inspiring. But it seems impossibly difficult for a sinner like me. These are impossibly large footsteps to fill.

The young boy started out okay. It was somewhat of a game at first to leap from boot print to boot print in the snow. Jumping however, was every bit as tiring as trudging through it and soon the jumps weren't getting as high and the snow seemed deeper somehow, even thicker as it grabbed at his toes and tried to trip him up. Daddy's legs were ever so much longer. His balance began to waiver first, making it hard even to hit those big old boot prints and then it caught him. It felt like the snow just reached up and pulled his foot down as he jumped and suddenly there was a little boy print in the snow. Not so angelic, it looked more like those cartoon images of the character running though the wall. The whine began to raise almost immediately.

And so it is with me, so it was with Peter, so it is with all Christians. We start out strong and anxious to follow in our Saviors footsteps, to let His Word and will be our guide and then ... Splat! Facedown in the snow again, in the mud again, in our sin again! That's why I find the final verses of our lesson so interesting. At first, it would sound like the Holy Spirit is telling us what we are to be like, but then a shift occurs.

<sup>22</sup> *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."* <sup>23</sup> *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* Peter tells us that Jesus was perfect. He never suffered because He deserved it, though He suffered mightily for proclaiming the truth. Instead of fighting back, instead of getting even, He perfectly entrusted Himself to the one who judges justly. I can easily imagine Peter thinking about that prayer he had heard in the Garden, *"Not My will but Yours be done (Luke 22:42)."*

But then just as despair begins to seize my heart because I just can't keep up with my Shepherd, Peter shows me that it's not Jesus my example, but Jesus my Savior whose footsteps I have been leaping into all along. <sup>24</sup> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.* <sup>25</sup> *For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

And there it is! While Jesus is certainly an excellent example, while I will seek to follow Him in every aspect of my life, He cannot simply be my guide for the law always ends up showing

me my sin, always ends up showing me how impossibly large those footsteps I follow in are. So Peter shows us the Gospel.

Jesus was perfect and set a perfect example, that He might declare the Law fulfilled for us. He set the perfect example in His suffering that our imperfect lives might be paid for in full. In words, which sound remarkable like those of Isaiah 53, Peter tells us even the self-inflicted wounds of my so called suffering are healed in the righteous wounds He bore for me on the cross. And though we are all like sheep going astray, we have a great Good Shepherd, watching over our souls and guaranteeing a place for us in heaven. No not because we hit every step with perfect precision but because our Savior, our Shepherd, lived and died and rose that we might be with him forever.

As the whine began to rise, suddenly so did the child. Dad had been watching the whole time, always mindful of the struggling little form behind him. “Let’s try it this way for a while now”, dad said as he placed his son on his shoulders. So the little guy was well rested and energetic again and spoke to his father, “Dad can you set me down so I can jump in your footprints again. Maybe I’ll be able to do more this time, but if I get tired, will you please pick me up? Isn’t that the life of a Christian? As we live lives for the one who lived for us, we find our strength and our energy for the tasks at hand in Him. When we struggle in the sorrow and the suffering, when we struggle with our own sinfulness, He’s there to point us to the cross to His forgiveness signed by His own suffering and sealed for us in His resurrection. **WALKING IN CHRIST’S FOOTSTEPS. THEY’RE IMPOSSIBLY LARGE SHOES TO FILL. That’s exactly why IN UNFATHOMABLE LOVE, HE WALKS FOR US. Amen.**