

1 Peter 2:21b-25 - 3rd Sun. of Easter - 10.4.2016

'Christian' Living

²¹ For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. ²² He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. ²³ He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. ²⁴ He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed. ²⁵ Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls. [NLT]

How do you react when you are wronged? Is it not often a case of 'payback' when somebody does something to us. Only, our payback is often with interest - is more than we received in the first place!

How to react when you are wronged? This question is highlighted in a different light since the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. How we react to things which occur in our daily lives, when others hurt us or wrong us is not to be governed by the 'natural order of things' Peter's concern is, in the true sense of the word, that we learn

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What do you do when somebody says things to you, or about you, which hurt? What do you do when in the traffic somebody irritates you - just pushes in after having jumped the queue? Do you just accept it and carry on - or does this spoil your entire day? When we are insulted or suffer some wrong, is it not quite natural to push back, to answer the unkind word or the strange look in kind?

But what is 'natural'? Which nature are we speaking of? Jesus had to come into our world, and die for our sin, because human nature - our nature - has been totally ruined by the Fall into sin. Since that time our reaction to what happens to us is - on the whole - inappropriate and unnatural. Because, even if we are in the wrong, we often react quite angrily - and shift the blame!

The message of Easter, however, is one that a change has taken place. That is the message we need to be reminded of as well: since our Baptism we no longer stand under a compulsion to pay back in the way we have been treated.

In the verses leading up to our passage, Peter addresses slaves. One could imagine that he would tell them: Since you are now Christians, demand just and fair treatment. Instead he says, **You who are slaves must accept the authority of your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you – not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel.** (V. 18)

'Christian' Living - not only when things go smoothly, not only when our rights are respected and everything is as we want it to be. It is especially when we are treated unfairly, when we are victimised, when we are slandered, that our Christian Living is to be apparent to those around us. The new freedom we have as people of God means that we are free now to obey, and to accept how things are.

Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. Our actions - how we live, what we do and say - is not to be determined by what others do to us, but by the example Christ has given us. He suffered for us so that we would be set free from the spiral of simply hitting back.

Christ suffered for you. - so that we would not keep on demanding our rights, but so that we would follow his example. What others do to us is not to be the determining factor in what we say and do and think. It is the example of Jesus that we are to follow, because through him we have been changed. Now we are to follow in the steps of him, who **did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered.**

Christian Living - that means that the message of Good Friday and Easter is to determine how we live - it is to be part of who we now are. What happened on the cross, and through the empty tomb, our lives are changed - it is now part of our history: **He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.**

We no longer have to fight for our rights, because what Christ did for us has put us in the right with God once more. We have been freed of sin - and that means we are no longer compelled to live according to the ways of this world. We can now live in a way that is right before God, and that pleases him, because we have been healed from that deadly sickness of me first!

So we no longer need to - almost despairingly - try to fight for our rights. We must no longer always think about ourselves first and foremost, we must no longer try to get what we believe we must have. That does not bring us any happiness! Our joy is based on the fact that Christ has fought for us - and now we have our place with God again.

The message of Easter: **But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls.** We have somebody who not only cares for us, but who takes care of us. If Christ has brought us back into God's fold, then we can be sure he is not just going to sit back as an uninterested spectator for the rest of our lives. Christ is not only interested in our spiritual life - we are important to him body and soul. He concerns himself with your questions and concerns, with your problems, with the unfairness of things happening in your life.

His call to us all is: turn these things over to me. I will care for you, I will see to it that you get everything you need.

Christian Living is about receiving what Christ did for us over and over. We may feel ashamed when we have once again failed to live as followers of our Lord. The Easter candle, which is lit every Sunday, is to be a beacon of hope for us - it serves to draw the attention away from us, and points us to Christ. This beacon is to light our days, so that we are reminded on every day to practise putting our lives and our needs in his hands. Every day we may turn to him, because we know that he is there for us.

Jesus made us new. Now we may trust his care and know that he will give us what we need. He will - when the time is right - ensure that the wrongs we have suffered will be turned to our advantage.

Christian Living - living in the way Christ wants us to. We can do this, because God's reaction to our actions was not a 'natural' one. He did not load all our sins on us, but instead loaded them all onto his own Son, That means that we have now been released to Christian Living - to living under the guidance and loving care of our Good Shepherd.