

**Until Christ is Formed in You**  
(Galatians 4:19)  
Sermon Series on 1<sup>st</sup> Peter

1 Peter 3:8 - 4:11

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## Introduction

Last Sunday Pastor Michelle did an excellent job of highlighting the challenge of living in the society of Jesus;

with all of the attendant values and practices of the way of Jesus

within the larger secular society.

Her example was what happened when in the ancient Greco-Roman household with its hierarchal structure of a senior male, a lesser member like a slave or a wife, becomes a Christian and can no longer observe the secular religious values and practices of the household and brings shame to the household in the larger society.

This, of course, produces the kind of suffering referred to in our passage and the counsel of Peter – the lead Christian of his day:

**But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed . . . Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.**

Peter's letter to the Christians of his day remains relevant for Christian life today.

Secular society has change drastically from 2,000 years ago, however, basic values and practices aspired to by ancient people remain attractive in our modern situation.

In fact, even when Peter makes reference to Noah's generation, some untold thousands of years previous, what people aspire to remains familiar.

Whether sympathy, love, compassion, and peace or their opposites of hostility, hatred, abuse, and violence

These values and practices, imbedded in the human condition, are as common in the human story today (just think of the news reports from last week – from the power of love to the specter of mass murder) as they were at the dawn of civilization.

Peter's counsel, God's Word in fact, guides and forms us into the values and practices of Jesus and his society as powerfully today as generations ago.

In today's reading we are again reminded of the way of Jesus, the society of Jesus, and are called to form our lives into his life with values and practices at times in conflict with our surrounding secular society, which results in suffering for the Christian.

But such suffering, is in fact, the crucible through which Christ is formed in us.

## Text

Now, there is much in our reading this morning. I want us to step back and consider the passage as a whole. If you read it over several times, something really jumps out.

Peter opens with a call to bring blessing (not just 'God bless you' but nuanced, profound, thick) into our world, even in the face of evil or insult being offered to us. He tells us: . . . **to this you were called . . . For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good.**

Peter closes with a call to in this life to be sober minded and self-controlled (get a hold of yourself) and, in parallel with his call to bring blessing, to use the gifts of God in our lives to serve others. (God's gifts in our life are only apparent as we get out and serve.)

But offered to us in the middle of our reading, there is this very strange example of what happened in the death of Christ.

Verse 19: **After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits – to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. (50+years?)**

What is that all about? What did Jesus Christ do in death? Why does Peter bring this up to explain why Christians ought to suffer for doing the good will of God in this life?

There are more questions than answers in coming to these verses. Indeed here are a couple of comments about these verses:

The eminent biblical scholar, Paul Achtemeier: This verse is one of the shorter, but surely the most problematic, in this letter, if not in the NT canon as a whole.

The Protestant Reformer, Luther: This is a strange text and certainly a more obscure passage than any other in the New Testament. I still do not know for sure what the apostle meant.

So, I am in good company when I also confess I am not sure what Peter tells us here.

Inevitably I, as a Pastor, am asked about these verses: did Jesus go into Hell and preach the Gospel to the resident spirits there? For what purpose, so they could be saved after death? I do not think so, but I am not sure what is being said here.

But I believe Peter's reference here to the work of Christ in death and to the epitome of the power of evil manifested on earth as experienced in the days of Noah; is to assure the followers of Christ in any day as to the ultimate victory and power of Jesus to be Lord of all.

As we seek to understand the reading as a whole and ask ourselves why Peter makes this reference to the days of Noah it helps to remind ourselves about those days:

Here are the passages from Genesis 6: (background – sons of God and daughters of men)

**The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth and it grieved him to his heart. . . . and the earth was filled with violence. (Greek/Roman Gods – violence)**

**But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord . . . a righteous man, blameless in his**

**generation; Noah walked with God . . . (to Noah: I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them.)**

From the New Testament book of Hebrews:

**By faith, Noah warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning**

What we can say, from the Biblical viewpoint, is that society in the days of Noah was the epitome of contra the Biblical God and the central manifestation of society's abandonment of the true Creator God was violence.

Undoubtedly violence in all of its manifestations: between people and between people and the animals and between people and the good created Earth.

Jesus says the end of days, just prior to his return, will be as the days of Noah.

Furthermore, Noah prefigures the epitome of a person of faith. His righteousness, blamelessness, and walking with God is against the backdrop of his refusal to conform to the values and practices of his surrounding society and instead for many, many years, through faith about events as yet unseen

devoted himself to a construction project that was a huge visible rejection of the values and practices of his surrounding society.

Noah would have suffered, as one who choose to walk with God rather than walk with the people of his times. This suffering brought Noah through the judgment of God and into the blessing of God. He trusted in the powers of God rather than the powers of his day.

### Application

Are we in the days of Noah? Perhaps. What does our reading teach us?

The suffering referred to by Peter arises from Christian witness in a non-Christian setting.

From the intimacy of household relationships to the society of Jesus in secular society.

I remember an incident in our own recent history when through careful deliberation we exercised loving and godly judgement with an individual and subsequently were maliciously slandered in the public media.

It was a suffering. Some people who did not understand and did not care to understand left our church.

Right now, the Church in Canada is experiencing a mild kind of suffering. We really could have been helped with a summer student through the Canada Jobs Program.

In past years we enjoyed the benefit of our taxes in this way.

But now, because we believe human life begins at conception and is sacred, the Canadian Government has cut us off from such benefits. They have declared our values are not in line with Canadian values.

So, what does Peter tell us? **Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.**

Two weeks ago, we considered Peter telling us: **But you are . . . a royal priesthood – those baptized in the Holy Spirit.**

The job of God's priest is to bring the blessing of God into his world. When Peter says:

**Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing . . .**

He is not simply saying we are to speak kindly, (God bless you), when we are insulted.

Rather we are to apply ourselves to the way of Jesus, to being formed in the values, practices and very person of Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit to bring God's goodness to the world around us.

Today is Pentecost. We celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit come down from Heaven and right into the lives of Jesus' disciples.

Our reading says: **Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others.**

This is the blessing we are called to and it is a sign of our eternal inheritance –

to bring the gifts of God (experienced in the power of the Holy Spirit) through the society of Jesus into our surrounding secular society. Amen.