

## **Holy and Hope-filled**

**2020-05-31**

**Pastor Sharon Tidd**

It's been a very troubling and dark week for our world. I've been grieving the light that has been lost in the passing of George Floyd. He was a believer and peace-maker. He worked for The Salvation Army and made a difference in this world. And I pray that his story will continue to make a difference in the fight against racism and bigotry and prejudice. His light has left this world, but the Light of Christ continues to shine through believers who stand for truth and justice and love. And George is now enjoying peace and grace eternally. He's celebrating Pentecost in the very presence of Father, Son and Spirit. That truth gives me hope. I trust it does you as well.

This is Pentecost Sunday; a day when the church of Jesus Christ celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit in power to Christ's earliest disciples (Acts 2) ... and His coming to us too. In a violent wind and tongues of fire, He came. And those who received Him that first Pentecost were empowered to speak in many languages and proclaim the good news of salvation through Jesus ... and the church grew because of their witness.

Peter was there. He gave the powerful sermon that cut men to the heart and convinced 3000 to become Jesus-followers. Peter, the brash fisherman who had denied Jesus when the going got tough, was transformed by the filling of the Spirit that day. He went on to work miracles, to heal many, to preach more and more sermons, and to plant many communities of faith across Asia Minor. It's his letters that we are studying through our sermon series, Bold

Obedience. And we return today to his first letter and the teaching that the Spirit inspired him to share through this letter.

You will recall that Peter was writing to scattered believers living in a time of great persecution. He reminded them in 1 Peter 2:11 that they were ‘aliens and strangers in the world’. Their citizenship was in the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven. But as they awaited the final reward of their salvation, they were to “live such good lives among the pagans, that ... they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits” (1 Peter 2:12). This call to goodness resounds throughout his first letter. He continues in chapters 2 and 3 to emphasize the need for goodness to be evident as believers lived in submission to governmental authorities and earthly masters, and as they lived and loved within their homes and families. And he stressed that their determination to do good was not to falter in the face of suffering, because Christ had suffered first, for them, dying to bring them healing (1 Peter 2:21, 24). By doing good in the midst of suffering, Peter declared, they would “silence the ignorant talk of foolish men” (1 Peter 2:15), the slander that was, at that time, at the root of much of their suffering.

In today’s passage (1 Peter 3:8-18a) this call to goodness resounds yet again. Take time now to read and meditate on these verses. (They flow from the passage we reflected on last Sunday.)

Peter begins this section with the word ‘finally’, meaning “to sum up” (verse 8), because this passage offers a re-stating/re-framing, in summation form, of what has been shared thus far in his letter.

In verse 8 he gives five bullet-like commands which capture what it means to live in holiness and purity, to “do good”:

1. Live in harmony with one another -- meaning a unity of heart and mind and spirit; a beautiful blending of actions and effort to offer a masterpiece of love and grace to the world. This unity is something for which Jesus had prayed (John 17:21-23).
2. Be sympathetic – the ability/desire to “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15), to put self aside and identify with another’s pain and sorrow.
3. Love as brothers (and sisters) – this was commanded by Christ and identified as a certain mark of true believers (John 13:34, 35) – to love (agape) is to offer unconditional, sacrificial, deep familial love! We are called to love one another and to love the world out of the love that God has so graciously offered to us.
4. Be compassionate – quite literally, “live with passion” – in the practical sense it means to feel deep pity that moves one to action, to empathize and come alongside with physical, emotional and spiritual care and support; to be compassionate is “to be willing to go with others to the place where they are weak, vulnerable, lonely, and broken” (according to Henri Nouwen), to be filled with a holy discontent when we witness injustice and choose to take concrete steps to bring change. To be compassionate means stopping and ministering as the Good Samaritan did.
5. Be humble. On this William Barclay says, “When the Christian remembers his dependence on God and keeps before him the standard of Christ he must remain humble.” As we live in harmony, sympathize, love, and offer compassion to others we do it from a place of

humility that acknowledges that we are sinners saved by grace! There is no room for pride or boasting.

Five bullet commands. How are you doing? Are these marks of a holy life evident in you? We have the power of the Holy Spirit within us, we have the example of Christ before us, and we have the gift of faith entrusted to us by God. The Triune God is with us as we live as aliens and strangers in our world, seeking to bring truth and light and love in the midst of much evil and darkness and despair. He is counting on us to tap into that Pentecostal power and “do good”, living holy lives in an unholy world!

In verse 9 Peter adds a 6<sup>th</sup> command, emphasizing the need to live in forgiveness. We are not to repay evil for evil or insult for insult, but rather to repay evil and insult with blessing. We are called to speak grace and mercy and forgiveness over those who wrong us. It’s far from easy, but Christ set the example, and we are to follow (1 Peter 2:21-23). Forgiveness is counter-cultural – it was then, it is today – but as those who have been sanctified (set apart) we are to be different and distinct from the people around us! As we live in forgiveness, Peter says, blessing flows to us – the blessing of God’s forgiveness, the blessing of a spirit freed from bitterness and anger, the blessing of peace with others and within our own heart and soul. Have you experienced those blessings as you’ve offered forgiveness? Remember those experiences in times when you struggle to forgive. As God has blessed in the past, He will bless again.

Peter next quotes from Psalm 34:12-16, reminding his first hearers (and us today) that God wants us to love life and see good days (verse 10a); after all, they are blessings from His hand! The best way to accomplish that, according to the Psalmist, is to control our tongues

(verse 10b), to do good (verse 11a), and to seek and pursue peace (verse 11b). The world gives us plenty of reasons not to, but our eyes aren't to be on the world, but on Christ! Remember, the Lord's eyes are on those who choose righteousness (verse 12)! The call to God's people from Old Testament times to New Testament times to the present-day is simply this, "do good"! As the prophet Micah put it, "Do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God!" (6:8). Have you been finding ways to live out this call in your home, your workplace, your neighbourhood; with family and friends? As you do, through the Spirit's power within, you will silence the foolish talk of ignorant men who will see your good deeds and glorify God!

In verse 13 Peter asks what should be a rhetorical question: "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?" You'd think the obvious answer would be "No one!", and in many cases this will be true, but Jesus experienced otherwise, didn't He? He suffered for doing good; and remaining "eager to do good", He suffered in order to do good for us! (1 Peter 2:24-25) Thus Peter goes on, in verse 14, "But, even if you should suffer for what is right you are blessed!" It will rarely feel like blessing, but God uses every suffering to refine our faith, bringing it to maturity, which is the goal of our salvation (1 Peter 1:7, 9). Are you able to accept suffering with this attitude? Do you feel blessed when you suffer for your faith? It can be a struggle, I know. It often is for me. But there are blessings that flow from standing firm through suffering ... especially suffering that comes directly from our decision to follow Christ and live in His ways? When we suffer, we need to ask God to enable us to see and feel His blessing; to remind us that His eyes are on us and His ears are attentive to our prayers (verse 12).

Peter also asserts that we are not to live in fear (verse 14) even in the face of suffering, re-iterating words from Isaiah 8:12-13. There's no need to. Instead of fear, we are "to set apart

Christ as LORD" (verse 15a). When the going is smooth and when the going is rough, we are to declare and affirm that Jesus is Sovereign! That He is in control of our lives. That He is aware of our circumstances; He sees, He knows, He cares. That He is Saviour and Redeemer, Author and Perfector of our faith! That He will be faithful to complete the work of salvation and sanctification that He has begun in us (Philippians 1:6). Set apart Christ as LORD!

Are you fearful? In times like these, fear can take root so easily (Satan certainly wants it to!), but we have a loving, all-powerful God watching over us and journeying with us through the storms and the struggles. He will lead us to green pastures by quiet waters (Psalm 23:1-2). We just have to keep on believing and trusting in Him, and keep on doing good.

In the midst of the struggles, as you stand firm in your faith in God's care and protection and choose to "do good", your life will be a witness to His goodness and grace. People will be astounded by your resiliency, borne by the Spirit. They'll be intrigued. They'll ask questions. And so you need to always be prepared, Peter says, to "give an answer ... for the hope that you have" (verse 15). And there is no doubt that you will have hope - living hope made available through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the hope of an eternal inheritance that cannot fade or spoil or perish (1 Peter 1:3-4). When people ask you "Why ... How do you have hope?" (most likely to occur when you are suffering) will you have an answer? Are you prepared to explain the hope that is you? If you're not sure, I recommend you pray about it and prepare a 30-second elevator answer! Write it out and memorize it. Then you will always be prepared!

When the time comes to give that answer, Peter says, do it with gentleness and respect (not bragging or flaunting, but humbly sharing) and with a clear conscience (knowing that your life matches your words; that you have lived in integrity, focussed on "doing good" ). As you do,

you'll silence malicious talk (verse 16). Yay! In fact, you'll cause those who have maligned your character to feel shame and remorse ... the first step in turning to God in repentance! It takes patient endurance and Christian maturity to get to this, but by God's grace we will each have these kinds of opportunities as we faithfully journey with Him in this world. And I know first-hand that the experience of helping someone turn to God is absolutely glorious!

Of course, you and I can only give an answer for our hope if we are living a hope-filled life. Is that your experience today? Or are you more often feeling discouraged and down-trodden? If hope is missing, re-connect with Jesus. He wants you to know hope in all situations, even in the midst of suffering, because hope-filled Christ-followers inspire others to follow Him too!

In case anyone has yet to get his primary message, Peter re-states, "It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good, than for doing evil" (verse 17). That being the case, let's make sure that our suffering results from our choosing to do good, and not from a choice to do evil. Christ is the example, always! He "died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God!" (verse 18a). His work at Calvary was for you. It was personal! He loves you and died for you! Verse 18a offers a statement worth memorizing. Jesus did good on earth and, as a result, He suffered greatly; but His suffering brought you and I much good – it brought us to God. Your suffering and my suffering can bring good too. Are you willing to share in His sufferings so that others can be brought to God?

Do you want to do good and bring good to others? There is plenty of good to be done in this world. It needs your light and your love desperately! Wouldn't it be great to be known as a Christ-follower who truly is eager to do good?

