

## **By the Spirit**

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We pick up our sermon series, Bold Obedience, again today at 1 Peter 3, verses 18-22. I invite you to take a few moments now to prayerfully and reflectively read those verses.

Throughout his letter, the Apostle Peter has encouraged his readers (past and present) to spend their lives “doing good”. Again and again this word is repeated. There is no higher calling. There is no greater purpose. As Christ-followers we are here to “do good” for others. Is your life focussed on that? Is mine? If not, why not? As we move forward into today’s passage, we are offered a sense of how we can “do good”.

I don’t know about you, but I know that in and of myself I don’t have it in me to “do good”. I don’t have a natural inclination to put others first. I don’t have an innate drive to live sacrificially. I don’t easily forgive. I don’t readily offer unconditional love and acceptance. Sympathy, compassion, humility? Again, those don’t flow naturally from me.

I’m thinking the first recipients of Peter’s letter felt pretty much the same. Of course, they had some pretty good reasons to struggle with doing good. They

lived in a time where being kind to another, especially if done in the name of Jesus, could quickly bring intense mockery and hatred. And, no doubt, it would have been hard to love and sympathize with people who were eager to hand you over to officials who would happily imprison you. Today in Canada, we don't face those kinds of risks as we offer love in Jesus' Name. In reaching out to others who don't share our beliefs, we don't generally have to fear persecution. We have the freedom to live out our faith, to be different, to show by our love and caring that we are set apart. Yet still, for me at least, doing good doesn't come easy. Why is that? I think, too often, I try and fail because I try to "do good" in my own strength. That was never God's intention! You and I "do good" only through the power of God in us. That's what Peter seeks to explain in today's passage.

Peter makes it clear that it is through the indwelling Spirit of God that we are able to live out this high calling to "do good". We are unrighteous and sinful; our ability to "do good" is compromised because of our sinfulness. But, thankfully, Christ died for sins once for all. He died in our place - the righteous for the unrighteous -- so that we could be brought back to God, who is holy (1 Peter 3:18). Our sinfulness was taken care of at the cross!

And it was the Spirit, Peter declares, who made Jesus alive again (1 Peter 3:19). That same Resurrecting Spirit is now with us and in us! Jesus promised that

He would come (John 16:7), and He did at Pentecost (Acts 3). In today's passage Peter offers some unique glimpses into the work of the Holy Spirit and how His ministry enables us to "do good".

1. Through the Spirit, Christ Proclaimed Good News!

Peter shares that after the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead, He empowered Him to go and preach to the spirits in prison; the ones who had disobeyed God in the days of Noah (1 Peter 3:19-20a). What Peter is saying here is that Jesus went into the recesses of Hades (the resting place of the dead in Jewish belief at that time) to share the Gospel with those who had died before His coming to earth. The Gospel was declared to them personally by Christ Jesus, the One who made salvation possible. Imagine that! On being raised from death, Jesus was sent by the Spirit to "do good"; to offer salvation and hope to those who had died in their sins. (Ever wonder what Jesus did between the first Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday? Now you know!)

The proclamation of the Gospel to those who had died in ages past was a priority for God, because His plan before the creation of the world was that all would have the opportunity to be saved. This is still His heart's longing. And that is why the Spirit now enables us, as He did Jesus, to go into the dark places of this world – places of death and decay, places of disobedience -- and share the Good

News of God's love and salvation. No person is unworthy of God's love. Through us, He longs to reach everyone with the truth that Christ died to save them, that sin and death has been conquered, and that there is hope for them. It doesn't matter what they've done or how they've disobeyed. God's love and forgiveness is available to all.

What Peter seeks to remind us of here is that we are enabled to share Good News as the Spirit of God within empowers us. He creates the opportunities. He opens the doors. He did it for Jesus. He'll do it for us! He will show us where to go with the Good News. He will tell us who to share it with. He will even guide us in how to share it. Never doubt that! He is with us in our sharing and He will bring fruit from our faithfulness. Sharing the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ is the most powerful way to "do good" in our world.

Are we eager to share Good News; to bring that message of hope? Or is there reluctance on our part? The best thing we can do for someone who does not know God's love, is to share the story of Jesus. People need to hear it. If knowing Christ and receiving His gift of salvation has been life-changing for us, if it has brought us peace and hope and joy, if it has given us real purpose ... and I assume it has ... why would we not want to share it with our friends, our family, our co-workers, our neighbours?

Through the Spirit we are enabled and empowered to “do good” by proclaiming Good News!

## 2. We are Saved through Holy Spirit Baptism

Peter speaks of the flood-waters of judgement that came in Noah’s day, and of the eight that were carried safely, through the waters, in the ark. He states that the eight were saved/delivered through water, and that their salvation is a picture of the baptism of the Spirit experienced by all who place their trust in Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection as the means of receiving God’s salvation.

“Baptism now saves you!” (1 Peter 3:20b-21)

What does it mean to be saved through baptism by the Holy Spirit of God? The Scriptures share much on this subject. Spirit baptism means we are cleansed and freed from the hold of sin and death, and that we are made alive to God. (Romans 6:1-4) It means that we are daily convicted of our sin, whatever it may be (John 16:8-11), so that we can turn to God in true repentance. It means that we belong to God and are adopted into His family (Ephesians 1:5). It means that we are transformed by the Spirit so that we can live lives that are marked by the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control; fruits that only the Spirit can give (Galatians 5:22-23). It means

that we are empowered to be Christ's witnesses (Acts 1:8) – to declare with certainty the truth that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ God saves (1 Peter 3:21b)! This Holy Spirit baptism, and all its benefits, is a gift granted to every believer!

### 3. The Holy Spirit is our Pledge

Peter also declares in 1 Peter 3:21a, that being baptized by the Holy Spirit means we have “the pledge of a good conscience towards God”. Because of the Spirit's ongoing work in teaching, counselling, and convicting us day-by-day, we are able to live in holiness. All we have to do is heed His voice and choose to walk in obedience to Him. It is because of the Spirit that we can stand before God with that good, clear conscience! We may not act perfectly in all circumstances. We may slip up from time to time. We may not always “do good”, as we are called to do. And sometimes, in seeking to “do good”, we may miss the mark. But the Spirit, as our pledge (meaning our guarantee or assurance), will keep on speaking God's truth into our hearts and minds. He'll help us see when we're off-course and His loving counsel will draw us back to God through repentance. The Spirit's work is to keep convincing us to choose the path God has set before us; the place where forgiveness is readily available. And the Spirit's power within is what gives us the determination and the ability to “do good” as we walk humbly with God.

If we truly want to “do good”, we have to lean in to the Spirit of God. We have to choose His baptism daily. We have to allow His refining fire to cleanse and purify us. We have to claim the name He gives us – Child of God! We have to seek the holiness that comes from His indwelling presence so that we can reflect our Father well in this world. The Spirit in us is holy and righteous and good! You and I have to crave His fruit, not for our own sake, but for the good of others whom we are privileged to be able to love in Jesus’ Name.

In recent weeks there has been a wave of goodness expressed across North America in the wake of George Floyd’s death. The clarion call to love compassionately, to embrace and celebrate differences, and to fight against injustice perpetrated by racism and prejudice has rung loudly across North America. We’ve been invited to join peaceful protests, to seek out and listen to the stories that have necessitated the #blacklivesmatter movement, to do our part to bring an end to the oppression and distrust and hatred that so many black Canadians have experienced. Are we choosing to do good for our black brothers and sisters? This isn’t about politics. This is about the sanctity of each and every life created by the very breath of God. This is about affirming the value and worth that God places on every human being. Are we living in a way that holds closely

that value, that worth? We have an amazing opportunity to be a part of that great wave of goodness in these days!

You know, there was plenty of racial tension in Peter's day. Even within the church struggles often arose between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians. The Apostles were quick to declare that in Christ there is "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ" (Galatians 3:25). In fact, early on, Peter and the apostles had to take clear steps to ensure equal treatment in the care given to widows within the church family (Acts 6:1-7). The church has always believed that God's family is richer because of its diversity. But, even in holding to that belief, it has sometimes proven difficult to live. It was then. It is now. But we know, because God's Word declares it, that people from every nation, every tribe, and every tongue will make up God's glorious Kingdom (Revelation 5:9-10)! Are we helping to build that Kingdom today? The current struggles facing our continent give us unique opportunities. We can't sit on the sidelines of these struggles. God needs us each to "do good". His Word cries out, "Let justice flow like water, and righteousness like an unfailing stream." (Amos 5:24)

I found a quote this week that has really resonated in my heart and soul. It's from Scott Dewey of Mile High Ministries:



*“Refuse to break faith with goodness glimpsed!”*

I see so much goodness in the midst of the struggle that is raging in our nation and in the USA, and I want to stand in unity with those who are walking in goodness. What about you? Will you refuse to break faith with goodness glimpsed? Better yet, will you be someone who helps to create glimpses of goodness in this world that is so weighed down by darkness and hatred? Will you, through the power of the Spirit, “do good” today by speaking God’s love and reaching out in kindness and acceptance? If we each do this, what a wonderful world it will be!