

Sermon on **1 Peter 2:19-25** for Good Shepherd Sunday 4.30.23

St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

When I turned 5 years old, I knew it was a special day. It was March of 1986, and I would be allowed to take my pretest to see if I was ready for Kindergarten. Kindergarten would be my first real venture into academia outside of Sunday School. That summer I took the pretest. "Nate, can you walk on this straight line?" I stumbled a bit, but made it. "Can you reach out your arm straight and then bend your arm to touch your nose?" There were a string of these commands. Among other things Mrs. Spiegelberg was checking, she was seeing if I was learning one of the big valuable lessons of life, even masked as a game, "Follow the leader." Today the apostle Peter shows us one of the greatest ways, most God pleasing ways, and yet most difficult ways, we "Follow the Leader."

Follow the Leader, your Good Shepherd, in suffering.

Peter wrote to encourage believers, who were scattered, and suffered "*all kinds of trials*" for their faith. The sinful world is hostile to Christ, and his followers. Whether it persecutes by killing or maltreatment or disadvantages us socially, educationally, economically for our faith because we live to honor God in thought, word, and deed. We don't live or speak like the world. Our Good Shepherd knows this and sees you.

"For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. 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. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 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. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (1 Peter 2:19-25 NIV 2011).

Not all suffering is good suffering. If you do something sinful and get called on it, this is nothing to pat yourself on the back for, but to suffer because you did wrong. You do the crime. You do the time. That's not commendable. But what about when you suffer for doing good?

Christians were suffering because they were living their faith in a sinful world. Some were free. Some were slaves. And the Christians who were slaves or servants were especially vulnerable to mistreatment for their faith. Some masters and employers were good to them, but some were mean, unpredictable, hard to serve and resented them. Some even suffered physical mistreatment. Christians, no matter slave or free, were suffering. Peter says, "*if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.*" God knows what you suffer. He knows the injustice of it.

Peter says a difficult thing though, "*To this you were called.*" To this I was called? To suffer, to bear up and endure unjust suffering? If we follow the Good Shepherd, this is what will happen. The world, the devil, our sinful natures don't want us to have the one who loves us the most. They will do all they can to tear us and lead us away from him. The temptation is real!

I am not a sheep physically. I probably played one in a grade school drama production at one point, but did not spend any significant time with sheep. But I would guess that sheep stop following their shepherd or go astray for these reasons: 1) Sheep are tempted and think they see something better than where the Shepherd is leading them, or where he's placed them, and they wander away or become trapped, even easy fodder for the wolves going after things the shepherd has not allotted them. "The grass is always greener on the other side." Adam and Eve fell into this trap and thought what the devil offered them could beat the perfection God gave them. What death and destruction that brought! 2) Sheep misplace their focus. They glare at the newness and the scariness of where the shepherd is leading them or what he's leading them through instead of focusing on the Shepherd they follow and trust him. Peter fell into this trap when he looked at the wind and waves instead of Jesus and started slipping beneath them, or when he scolded Jesus for saying he was going to suffer and die for the world, or when he had to put down his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane and ran in fear, and locked himself away even on Easter Sunday morning. 3) Sheep get distracted by the good thing they have or by something whatever it might be even another sheep going astray, and they

fall behind and become lost or separated. Martha was distracted by all the good preparations that needed to be made and wanted to scold Mary who sat at Jesus' feet listening. Jesus showed her the importance of the one thing needful – listening to the Shepherd's voice. The sheep had forgotten that.

Is this true for you? Have you been tempted to think some sin is better than what your Shepherd has allotted, or according to the timing your God has commanded. So you've taken what is not yours, you've partaken of forbidden fruit? Have you been paralyzed by fear and anxiety as you glare at the fearful looking things in front of that you may have to suffer, and the what-ifs and you dig in your hooves, refusing to follow your Shepherd and walk his path. Instead you stand and worry, or complain, and grumble when you do have to suffer rather than endure it patiently. Have you been distracted by all the things to do or the opportunities for you or your children, or you've been so busy trying to hold it all together so you've stopped listening to your Shepherd's voice, or begun to think it doesn't help. Peter writes to you, *"you were like sheep going astray."*

Return to him and see who it is you follow. *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was in his mouth."* Peter quotes Isaiah the prophet who predicted Christ's suffering and death. Why did he suffer, for his own sins? No, it was for us sheep who went astray. Our sins, our failures, our selfish, slow, sheep-ly ways. He paid our debt, the debt of our sins. He suffered for them so God forgives you. And he has. He forgave wayward sheep, you and me. Jesus left the 99 to find you, his lost sheep, to return you to him, so you follow him your only Savior, the Good Shepherd.

"Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." The Good Shepherd who laid down his life for you leads you. Will we follow him through the valley? It must have been an art lesson in 1st or 2nd grade. I could not draw free-hand well and practice was not seeming to help. Then Mrs. Yehl handed out some paper with an elephant printed on it, along with a clean sheet of paper. She told us to take our thin paper and place it over the drawing. She taught us to trace the lines beneath our paper. I drew the elephant. Jesus has left his example for us to place our lives over the top and trace. Jesus has given us steps to follow. We lay our lives over his, and trace each day. We were like sheep going astray, but now we follow. *"You have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."*

Christ left us his example of how we as Christians can handle unjust suffering. When the chief priests and leaders of the Jews hurled their insults at him whether at the trial or while he suffered on the cross, what did Jesus do, *"he did not retaliate."* When they pounded nails into his flesh, what were his words to his Father? *"Father, forgive them."* When the thief repented, what were his words, *"Today, you will be with me in paradise."* When he suffered unjustly, did he complain or breathe out anger and rage? *"He made no threats."* *"Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."* He had confidence in his Father that He would take care of it and had a plan for him, for this. He suffered for the sins of the world. He won our forgiveness and eternal life.

So look at your life, and you think of the ways you suffer unjustly or may have to suffer unjustly for doing the right thing, for living as a Christian who trusts and follows Jesus, trying to love your neighbor as yourself, even when they make it so difficult and they do the opposite to you. Don't be scared, don't dig your hooves in. Follow your Good Shepherd, because he suffered and endured all for you his sheep, and he blessed you through it. *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."*

Sin no longer controls you. You can tell it "no." Guilt no longer controls you. You can point to the cross and show where your sin was forgiven. You can look at the waves and the wind, the darkest valleys, and the great to-do lists, and turn and look to your shepherd and follow. Adam and Eve held on to the promise and shared it with their children. Peter was forgiven and proclaimed Christ even though it meant persecution and imprisonment, threats on his life, and even wrote these words to us. Martha made her great confession of Christ even in the face of her brother's death, fully confident of the resurrection. You too, Christian scattered and suffering, Trace your life over his. He will bless you as you suffer and endure, and as you live entrusting yourself in all situations to him. *"You have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."* **Follow the leader, your Good Shepherd, in suffering.** He knows. And he knows how to bless you through it. What a leader to follow. What love our Shepherd has for us. Amen.