



LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

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Kimberly P. Johnson, Guest Lectionary Commentator

Assistant Professor of Communication, Tennessee State University

Lection – 1 Peter 2:21-25 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 21) For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. (v. 22) “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” (v. 23) When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. (v. 24) He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. (v. 25) For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

Good Friday is the sixth day of Holy Week and it commemorates the trial, crucifixion, and burial of Jesus Christ at Calvary. On this day, we enter into a period of mourning as we try to imagine the amount of callous abuse and suffering that Jesus endured, at the hand of the Roman Government, in order to give each of us the gift of salvation. Although this liturgical moment is extremely somber and may cause us to question the “Good” in Good Friday, when all we can see is the injustice of a trial gone wrong, with an unfathomable rendering of a death penalty verdict, we must resist the temptation to gloss over Jesus’ death and skip to his resurrection on Easter.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: 1 Peter 2:21-25

Part One: The Contemporary Context of the Interpreter

As someone who teaches in an institution of higher learning, I am struck by the number of stories my colleagues and I have shared or heard over the years about students disrespecting their professors—students are cursing out their professors and even threatening to harm them. But, when I turn on the television to catch a prime-time episode, look at the news to watch a presidential address, or even glance at Reality TV, I should not be surprised by how much students adamantly refuse to accept the authority of human institutions. Any time an elected official can accuse the President of the United States of America of lying in the middle of his televised address to Congress, and it appear to the millions of viewers watching that no disciplinary measures are taken to prohibit this type of behavior in the future, how can we expect our young people to respect those in positions of authority if we do not hold adults accountable for their behavior? In our text, Peter is the one who holds Christians accountable to their beliefs and values.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

In this first Epistle of Peter, he addresses all of the Christians scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia—otherwise known as Asia Minor. His goal is to urge the Christians in the five Roman Provinces to hold fast to their Christian beliefs and values despite who might try to persecute them. Roman society was quite closed and was not receptive to the conversion of Gentiles to Christianity because Christianity was viewed as a foreign religion that could possibly incite total chaos and insurrection against the Roman Government. As a result of this tension, Peter informs all the Christians that unjust suffering comes to purify our faith and that the reward for our faithfulness is salvation.

Our focal text opens in the middle of a conversation that Peter is having with the slaves. He has just finished telling all of the exiles to “accept the authority of every human institution” (v.13); and now he wants to spend a little more time focusing on those who are enslaved and work as servants because his intent is not to abolish the institution of servitude but to encourage slaves to maintain their Christian values even when it comes to accepting the authority of their masters—those who are kind and those who are harsh (see v. 18), for anyone who “endure[s] pain while suffering unjustly. . . [has] God’s approval” (vv. 19-20), which means they find favor with God.

After making such a bold and difficult-to-hear claim, we arrive at verse 21, where Peter says, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.” Here, he informs us that we are to do no wrong because we have been called to follow in the footsteps of Christ. But the problem in the text arises over the fact that Jesus was without sin or deceit, yet he was abused and suffered a horrific death. Preachers need to be very clear: Peter is not saying that we are called to suffer or even die as martyrs. What he is saying is in the form of a conditional argument where the “if” clause establishes the conditional relationship under which the second clause will take place. We know this to be true because he uses previous sentences to construct conditional arguments that help clarify the necessity to be without sin, as explained in his main conditional argument: The antecedent, “if you endure [pain] when you do right and suffer for it,” leads us to the consequent, “you have God’s approval” (v. 20).

Next, Peter begins to dissect exactly how Jesus' suffering serves as an example for all believers. We begin to understand what it means and what it looks like to suffer for righteousness. Peter explains that Jesus did nothing wrong, so he was without sin or blemish, and while the Romans abused him, "he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten" (v. 23).

Then, when we become privy to Jesus' plan not to retaliate, we learn of his decision to entrust himself to the "one who judges justly" (v. 23), and we discover that those who are willing to suffer innocently find favor with God—they have God's approval. When I think about the inhumane way in which he suffered and died, my mind tells me that he had every right to retaliate, but my heart is overjoyed by the fact that he did not retaliate or reject the authority of the Roman Government. Because any type of retaliation would have produced sin and negated Jesus' ability to take on the sins of the world. In Jesus' dying moment, though he was free from sin, he bore our sin to give us the gift of salvation so that we might return to him, the shepherd and guardian of our souls. Amen.

Challenge

During this Good Friday marathon of preaching, resist the temptation to preach a sermon that ends in Jesus' resurrection before Easter Sunday officially arrives. Instead, choose to grapple with the heart-wrenching events of our Savior's trial, crucifixion, and burial, which are commemorated on today. In your sermon, you might want to challenge people to think about those in authoritative positions over them and the type of behavior they show those individuals during their interactions. For this Good Friday/Easter Sunday weekend, the challenge is to be without sin, to let our words be free from deceit, and to trust in the one who judges justly.

Descriptive Details

Sounds: The earthquake sound of the cross being placed at Calvary; Nails being hammered into Jesus' hands and feet; people screaming, begging, and crying for Jesus to do something;

Sights: Jesus hanging on the cross, dehydrated with blood pouring out of his side; sheep returning to their shepherd;

Smells: The odor of fresh blood and sweat; and

Colors: A blue sky that has gone dark; and dripping red blood.

III. Other Sermonic Comments or Suggestions

The Scriptures used for a Seven Last Words Service and their key phrases:

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

"Today, you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

"Woman, behold your son". . . "Behold your mother" (John 19:26-27).

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:33-34).

"I thirst" (John 19:28).

"It is finished" (John 19:30).

"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Illustration

A Dry Socket

Some time ago, I suffered from a bad tooth. I had to have it pulled. I went to the dentist and she pulled it. She had me watch a video giving instructions on what to do and what not to do after leaving her office. I went home with a sore mouth. After three days of continued pain, I called the dentist back to complain about the extremely uncomfortable pain. She told me to come back in immediately, so I did. She asked if I had been drinking liquids out of a straw. I said, "Yes." She quickly informed me that I had a "dry socket." I said, "What is a dry socket?" She asked, "Didn't you watch the instructions on the video?" I really had not paid much attention to the video. So I asked, "What do we need to do to stop the pain?" She said, "I will make an incision so that the blood can flow again. Without the blood flowing you will not heal."

I thought someone needed to know that today. Somebody has a dry situation going on in their life and what you need is to let the blood of Jesus flow. Without that blood you will not be healed. What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make us whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. O precious is the flow . . . No other fount I know. Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

—Derrick Hughes, Memphis, Tennessee

Fluff the Car Chaser

My family has a pet, a dog, named Fluffy. We love her. She's black and she's fuzzy. We rescued her from the pound. Fluffy is a sweet dog, what I call a companion dog. Whatever room we're in, she's there. At night she'll go from bedroom to bedroom just to check on us and make sure we're alright. But, Fluffy has issues. Fluffy likes to chase cars. She'll be out there chasing cars and we'll say, "Fluffy, don't do it!" but she still chases cars. So, we said we were going to try some training on Fluffy. We tried doggy time-outs and even sent her to obedience school. Paid good money to a canine academy, and she came home with a degree. But as soon as she got outside, she was chasing cars. She refused to stop.

One New Year's Eve morning, my family was up and the house was quiet, and all of a sudden we heard the sound of screeching tires and a crying dog, and the family ran to the front door and looked out. There was Fluffy. She had been hit by a car, and she was dragging her broken, bloody, bruised leg down the driveway coming back into the house. We scooped her up and took her to the veterinarian. The vet examined her and said, "Your dog has been seriously injured and to repair her would require surgery. You have two choices. Pay us \$5,000.00 and we can save her. Or, pay us \$5.00 and we can put her to sleep. My husband looked at me and I looked at him. He said, "Five thousand dollars, baby?" And I said, "Or five."

Church, that was a tough decision, but you know we prayed right there in the vet's office, and as we prayed, the Lord reminded us that a long time ago we, too, were like Fluffy. A long time ago we were doing some things that we know we ought not to have done, and we got caught up in sin and sin beat us up. And we found ourselves bloody and bruised, and we dragged our broken selves back to God's house. And God said, "I've a choice. I can give my Son on Calvary, or let you go." I'm so glad that God paid the high price on Calvary.

—Sharon Patterson, "God Wants You to Grow Up."

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