

# Disciples - Endure and Return

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1 Peter 2

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We ended last week with a discipleship prayer...a prayer of what we would offer to God, whether it be more time in prayer, an act of service, or a commitment to a new spiritual practice. That Sunday I emphasized we do something to get on the way with Jesus. Hopefully you did. Usually we have some idea of what we might do to start or, if we were willing, God probably dropped an idea into our prayer.

One member wrote how she is working hard to not judge others and every time a judgment enters into her mind, she stops and reminds herself that only God has that right.

I'm sure there are many other examples, keep them coming and I'll lift them up. It is good for us to see how others are practicing our Christian faith.

Today I want to drill deeper as to what it means to walk with Jesus. The first point to make is our walk with Jesus is not a theological affirmation but is a practice, something we are to do every day. We are to try to live everyday differently than we would otherwise because we are "aware of God."

When we live in a way that is unaware of God, our minds are clouded, like an overcast day. The more stuck in the frustrations of work and family we are, the lower the clouds, and sometimes the fog is all around and we cannot see our way through. But when we are "aware of God" the light breaks through the clouds. Whenever that happens in our sky, it is beautiful, awesome. Gazing upon the light, we stop and consider...God is here. To be aware of God is to know who we are living for--not the clouds but the author of beauty and light.

Our scripture is full of stormy words: endure pain, suffer unjustly, beaten, and reviled. It is written to Christians living in Rome, scholars say towards the end of the 1st century, around 60 years after Jesus' death. This is not an easy time for Christians. It is the time when they were not welcomed in the synagogue or Rome. To be a Christian is, by definition, to be part of a minority considered outside traditional Roman

values and even to be considered enemies of the empire. I'm starting to sound like a broken record for all of our New Testament, written in the first century, is written during a time when it was difficult to be a Christian. The practice of Christianity is formed, not when all is calm and would be Christians have lots of time to get away and meditate, but when they are in the midst of living under the authority of another's empire, struggling to be Christ's people.

"Beloved" writes Peter, "I beseech you as aliens and exiles,...be subject, for the Lord's sake to every human institution."

This exhortation is a pill that is very hard to swallow, especially since in our time and place we are not aliens and exiles. Sometimes we have within our purview the ability to spark God directed change in our businesses and our government and our church.

Still, I dare say that each of us must often swallow the "acceptance of another's authority" pill. We often live in the damaging wake of another's misdeeds. Everyone here has been wronged in some way. There is no thicker fog than when we are caught up in a litany of what has been done to us.

I remember a man once confessed that he was spent because he found himself having pretend conversations in his head, righting the wrong, disciplining the unjust, writing speeches. He was spending all his energy thinking about the wrong doers and their doings that he could no longer look up and see the light of God. Does this sound at all familiar?

When the epistle addresses servants, it is true that at the time there was an institution of slavery, but the letter, even then, saw beyond slaves to all who would walk in the way of Jesus. Notice that it is the servants, more particularly the household servants who are first addressed. 1 Peter chooses to speak first not to the ones with the power, the husbands (it was a different time), but those who live under another's authority, servants of the household. For we who choose to serve the larger household of God,

our model is not Pilate but Jesus.

The road to Emmaus was a much kinder and gentler road than the one we are invited to travel today. Would we end with the wine and the bread. Instead, we are told “it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly.”

Some will remember how last week I said that Isaiah 53 is about the suffering servant and before Jesus, the suffering servant often referred to Israel, the people of God. When Jesus died on the cross, the gospel writers found the suffering servant by whose wounds we are healed. It would seem like we could hang it all on him. But no. By the end of the first century instead of letting Jesus do all the suffering for our sake, 1 Peter has the nerve to reclaim the suffering servant role for the brothers and sisters of Christ. Oh, lucky day!

“If you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval. For to this you have been called...”

As distasteful as this is, and truly there is no sugar to help make this medicine go down, I need to say that you are not called to go out and seek suffering for suffering’s sake. You do not get God points for hurting yourself. Nor is this warrant to go find a life partner who will hit you or stay with one who does. Don’t use God to excuse abuse. The point is when you do right (and often that means righting your own mistake) the result is sometimes you suffer. This is not a call to suffering but rather an acknowledgement of the reality that suffering is part of living right lives. The call is to endure and do right despite of it.

Let’s admit that it is hard to do right when we’ve been hit. And there are times when it is downright impossible. The moment when the bomb explodes, our body reacts, the adrenaline rises, our frontal lobe—the part of the brain which holds our higher reasoning—flips out, and we act out of instinct. To react is human. To keep walking, to move through the reaction, past the debris, into a place of grace is the daily work of a Christian...it is our practice.

Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.

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.

Now those of you who have read the gospels know that Jesus could be as irritable as anyone. He was often angry with his disciples who refused to believe Jesus when he said that he would suffer and die and after 3 days be raised. Despite Isaiah 53, while he lived, no one wanted to envision him in the role of the suffering servant. Even Jesus had his moment in the garden.

But Jesus kept walking all the way to the cross. There, as he was dying, he cried out “father, forgive them.”

...leaving you an example that you might follow in his steps.

The Way of Christ that rights relationships and leads us out of suffering runs right through the cross.

Oh, there are so many ways to avoid the cross. We are experts. You can pretend like the bomb doesn’t affect you. You can forget and live a lie. You can plan your revenge. You can blame it all on them. You can decide that you are against therapy or that you simply aren’t able to dig deeply into your soul. You can hide behind right doctrine. You can run from here to there.

The Christians in Peter’s time were disliked and abused. It was hard for them. They didn’t have to become Christians in name. They could have simply believed in their hearts. But they didn’t. They didn’t forget, or plan revenge, or run. They chose to practice their faith.

Again and again testimony is given on the streets, in the synagogues, in people’s homes. The testimony, despite the cross, Jesus lives.

Christianity is more than a doctrine, it is way of life that moves through the cross.

You have been hurt. Your life has been unfair. No, more than unfair, you have nothing that you were supposed to have. You have been abused, torn apart, and spit out. You have been forgotten, ripped off, left behind, and cursed. You have been hated, wronged, beaten; defeated, conquered, subjugated... mistreated, mutilated, persecuted, victimized, insulted, wounded.

Yes.

The Christian answer is not “life is unfair, live with it,” the answer is the cross. The power of sin damages us all. Those who do the best to love us mess up. People seeking to make their mark in the world do wrong. Human beings stuck in the fog of their own struggle run into us, knock us down. Bombs are thrown before the frontal lobe has fallen back into place. And evil does seek its victims.

The cross is where “unfair” falls away, the light breaks through the clouds, and a new way of living is found. You can’t go there unless you have been hurt or are attached to one who is hurting. You can’t go there unless you are seeking answer for the pain inside yourself or the pain that is part of our world. At one time or another, all disciples who choose to continue to walk with Jesus through the debris of wrong, find themselves there, at the foot of the cross. We are called....

A man had been given the news that his 9 year old son’s cancer was progressing. Acting as chaplain for a Summer, I was called in. Never before had I seen such pain and rage running rampant in a soul. To this man gulping down sobs it didn’t matter that I was young, a wet behind the ears seminary student who cursed God every day I spent in that hospital because the pain I entered into threatened to undo me. He had questions about the Bible. I answered the best I could. After a little while, as he jumped from topic to topic, trying to find a foot hold, Jesus appeared in my mind’s eye. It was so clear. To the father, I spoke the one image that had the power to make him stop his rant: “The answer for you is not in the parables or even the Psalms, it is at the foot of the cross.”

The stream of words ceased. Instead of shouts, silent tears filled his eyes, peace.

We sat for awhile. After some time passed we looked over at the hospital bed. In the same hospital room where we wrestled together to find God in the midst of our pain, his son played a video game, wearing headphones, smiling, engaged, and alive.

I left as the father took off the son’s earphones and asked him about how he was doing in the game.

All Christians will walk through the debris of what

is wrong in this world, things beyond our control. When we stop and argue; when we blame; when we look for a bomb to throw, we like sheep have gone astray. It takes great faith to swallow the pill of another’s authority, to not repay wrong with wrong, but to trust in God. It takes practice.

Consider this as we pray in a moment, that in some part of your life, wherever you see the most clouds, consider making the choice to stop the fight, to practice letting go. Instead, entrust whatever it is to the one who judges rightly. That doesn’t mean you are done. Keep on walking, doing what is right. And, even if you are led to the cross, even if some part of you must die, it isn’t the end. Choose to be aware of God; choose to see the light shining through. Keep on walking. The cross is where you have to go sometimes when you are with the shepherd...sometimes it is the only place you can go to be healed.

“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.”

The cross is a stop on the journey but it is never the last stop. It wasn’t for Jesus and it isn’t for us. Keep on walking. Someone you love is waiting.

## 1 Peter 2

Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built\* into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

'See, I am laying in Zion a stone,

a cornerstone chosen and precious;

and whoever believes in him\* will not be put to shame.'

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,

'The stone that the builders rejected

has become the very head of the corner',

and

'A stone that makes them stumble,

and a rock that makes them fall.'

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,\* in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Once you were not a people,

but now you are God's people;

once you had not received mercy,

but now you have received mercy.