5-28-17 Rev. Amy Haines

1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11 Rooted in Christ

Last Monday at Springboro Intermediate’s awards assembly, Mac Reese stopped by to say thanks for the support he received from the sixth graders. He also shared a few things he has learned this past year that might be helpful for the students as they face upcoming times of transition.

One of the realizations Mac shared was that whenever he started to think about how bad his struggle was, there was always someone on his floor at Dayton Children’s that faced a struggle much worse. Mac also encouraged the sixth graders to be thankful for everyone who supported them, their family and their friends.

Have you ever found yourself thinking that no one could possibly understand your struggles with financial woes, the grief of a sudden loss, the fear of health concerns, or a personnel conflict at work? Have you ever found yourself feeling like you were all alone in your struggles?

If you have ever felt that way, 1 Peter reminds us once again today that we are not alone. Our struggles and suffering may be different than the person beside us, but we all go through various trials and trying times in our lives.

In our world there are three common forms of suffering. There is suffering that happens because we are human beings. Things go wrong. Our bodies wear out. We find ourselves affected by the choices of someone else. There is suffering that happens as a consequence of our choices or sinful actions. Drunkenness will bring about a hangover. Infidelity will ruin a marriage. Texting while driving can cause an accident or worse. Then there is suffering that happens because we follow Jesus.

Christian suffering, especially for the first century church, was to be expected. They were following Jesus who was crucified because the ruling powers and religious leaders did not like what he said or did. As followers of Jesus, they were viewed as the outcasts of society. The Jews viewed Christians as radical blasphemers who followed a false messiah. The Romans viewed Christians as enemies to the state because they refused to bow down and worship the emperor as a god. Under some Roman leaders, merely claiming the name of Christ was illegal:

“In the late second century, Athenagoras wrote an apology addressed to Marcus Aurelius in which he asked, “Why is a mere name so odious to you? Names are not deserving of hatred;

it is the unjust act that calls for penalty and punishment.”” -Craddock, p. 290

At times these early Christians felt alone, isolated from other Christian communities spread across the Roman Empire. At times these early Christians wondered if trying to live right, according to God’s ways, faithfully following Jesus, was worth the suffering they faced.

1 Peter was written to these faithful communities to offer them comfort and to offer them hope. These words also speak to us today, over 2000 years later, as God’s living Word to offer us hope and encouragement for the living of these days.

You and I will not face the fear of death for our faith. Yet we are not immune to suffering in all its forms, and anyone who tells you that as a Christian you will not face suffering is lying to you.

We will still face suffering that comes from sin and suffering from our humanness. If we are serious about living out our Christian faith in our daily life, we will also face suffering for our faith, albeit in much subtler ways.

We may be thought of as weird because we cared for a stranger. We may be viewed as pushy when we simply invite others to church or Sunday School. We may get passed up for a promotion at work because we care about our coworkers. We may be looked upon as anti-patriotic when we pray for peace and the safety of men, women, and children of all nations.

In whatever ways we suffer for our faith, 1 Peter offers a strange word of encouragement—rejoice in your suffering. Do not rejoice merely because you suffer. Do not rejoice because someone else suffers. Do not rejoice and suffer passively, believing there is nothing you can do to change your circumstances.

Rather rejoice in your suffering for Christ because as you suffer, you share in Christ’s suffering.

And if you share in Christ’s suffering, you will also then share in Christ’s glory.

Others may leave you when you are at your lowest. Relationships often strain to the breaking point during the trials of life. Yet Christ will never leave us nor forsake us. Christ is with us in our pain, in our confusion, and in our sorrow. For what we experience, Christ experienced before us.

So when we share in Christ’s suffering in the here and now, we are also promised Christ’s glory in the future, the promise of eternal life, the victory over sin and death.

..At the Nicene Council, an important church meeting in the 4th century A.D., of the 318 delegates attending, fewer than 12 had not lost an eye or lost a hand or did not limp on a leg lamed by torture for their Christian faith. -Vance Havner. Sermonillustrations.com:suffering

Those men knew firsthand what it meant to suffer for Christ. Yet they continued living by the faith and hope that one day they would also share in Christ’s glory. As they lived in the now and not yet, they faced the fiery trials of this life. Like metal tested by fire, these early disciples were tested by the suffering and struggle of their faith lives, and were made stronger because of what they endured for the sake of the good news of Jesus Christ.

To a lesser degree, we see this same struggle, perseverance and growth lived out every day around us. Consider the members of any sports team whose goal is to win as many games as possible, growing stronger with each practice and each game. They suffer the struggle of learning the game they love, learning how to work as a team, and learning how to play past hurt and exhaustion for the hope of future glory.

Consider the members of the military, past and present, who served our country expecting suffering, expecting that some will not make it home during wartime, yet also hopeful that they can do their part to protect, serve and win victory over our country’s enemy.

..Martin Treptow was a barber turned soldier during World War I. On the western front, as part of the Rainbow Division, Martin was killed trying to deliver a message between platoons. On his body was found a diary, and written in the flyleaf he had written these words under the heading, “My Pledge”: "America must win this war. Therefore, I will work, I will save, I will sacrifice, I will endure, I will fight cheerfully and do my utmost, as if the issue of the whole struggle depended on me alone." --arlingtoncemetery.net

As Christians we may struggle, yet we live by hope of a better day, a better world, a better witness tomorrow, the hope of future glory.

Listen again to the words of our Scripture today, words of encouragement now translated by Eugene Peterson in The Message: Friends, when life gets really difficult, don’t jump to the conclusion that God isn’t on the job. Instead, be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced. This is a spiritual refining process, with glory just around the corner. If you’re abused because of Christ, count yourself fortunate. It’s the Spirit of God and his glory in you that brought you to the notice of others. If they’re on you because you broke the law or disturbed the peace, that’s a different matter. But if it’s because you’re a Christian, don’t give it a second thought. Be proud of the distinguished status reflected in that name! (12-16)

No matter what we face in life, the good news we can cling to today is that our suffering, our struggle, even our victories are not the last word. Only God has the final say, and we already know that in the last days, God wins!

And we already know as Easter people that after death comes the promise of life eternal for those who believe in Jesus. And we already know that God promises to be with us in the here and now, with his presence, his promises, his strength, his support. We are still an Easter people here today who are sustained and encouraged by the hope that, whatever comes, God has joined us to the suffering and victory of Christ, whom God has raised from the dead and ascended into heaven.

This month, as we have pondered God’s word from the letter of 1 Peter, we have been reminded that we have been offered a godly inheritance that is claimed through our faith in Jesus Christ, and through our faith we can trust in Jesus as our firm foundation, our hope, and our strength in the midst of suffering.

We are called to be rooted in Christ—and the deeper our faith, the deeper our relationship with Jesus, the deeper our roots will go, roots that give us an anchor in the trials of this life.

..A. Parnell Bailey visited an orange grove where an irrigation pump had broken down. The season was unusually dry and some of the trees were beginning to die for lack of water.

The man giving the tour then took Bailey to his own orchard where irrigation was used sparingly. "These trees could go without rain for another 2 weeks," he said. "You see, when they were young, I frequently kept water from them. This hardship caused them to send their roots deeper into the soil in search of moisture. Now mine are the deepest-rooted trees in the area. While others are being scorched by the sun, these are finding moisture at a greater depth." -Our Daily Bread. Sermonsillustrations.com:suffering

Recall Jesus’ own words in John 15(:5) that declare: I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can’t do anything.

When we are attached to the vine, we are rooted in Christ. And when we are attached to the vine, we are also attached to other Christians as we share the same root.

Whatever suffering we will face as Christians, however bold or subtle, today remember that we are not alone, for God is with us and we are with God.

The early Christians, spread out across the Roman Empire, drew strength from the fact that they were not alone, but suffered with and received support from Christian brothers and sisters across the region. They also drew hope from the fact that they did not suffer apart from a God who loves them and cares for them and will one day welcome them into his eternal glory.

That love, that care, and that promise of eternal glory have not changed in twenty plus centuries. God still cares for us, in both the joys and the sufferings of life.

We are not alone in our struggles to lead Spirit-filled lives. We have brothers and sisters in Christ, especially right now in Egypt, who daily risk their lives just to claim the name of Jesus.

We have brothers and sisters in Christ, including in Vietnam, who will travel on foot for an hour just to gather for worship with fellow believers. We have brothers and sisters in Christ, all over the world, who know firsthand the risk of ridicule and rejection if they take a stand for injustice because of their faith in Jesus.

Yet these same brothers and sisters in Christ suffer for Christ because they know the power of his resurrection. They know what a difference Christ has made in their lives. Christ has given them hope, joy, peace, purpose, healing, and a new tomorrow.

Whatever happens in this life, God’s promises revealed in the glory of Christ and his resurrection are sure. God will continue to restore with creative gifts, to establish us firmly when we stumble, to give strength in times of weakness, and to build us up on the firm foundation of the community of faith (5:10).

-James Boyce 6-1-14 workingpreacher.org

Or put another way, “It won’t be long before this generous God who has great plans for us in Christ—eternal and glorious plans they are! —will have you put together and on your feet for good. He gets the last word; yes, he does.” (5:11 MSG )

..God hath not promised Skies ever blue,  
Flower-strewn pathways always for you.  
God hath not promised Sun without rain,  
Joy without sorrow, Peace without pain.  
But He hath promised Strength from above,  
Unfailing sympathy, undying love. -Unknown. Sermonillustrations.com:suffering

What are we willing to do in response to what God has already done and promises to do?

How are we willing to live as believers in the here and now, no matter what celebrations or struggles we face in life? Rooted in Christ, how do we live in such a way to reflect who we are as followers of Jesus?

1 Peter reminds us how to live, in ways that reflect Jesus’ own words in the Gospels.

Live by humility, not seeking power over others (Mt 23.12)

Do not be anxious; trust in God’s care (Mt 6:25)

Keep alert, living a disciplined life (Mt 24.42)

Watch out for the devil, who seeks to pounce when our guard is down (Mt 4.1-11)

Stand firm in faith

Remember fellow believers who suffer (Mt 6.9)

And finally, once again, remember the God of grace who has called you will empower you

-taken from James Boyce 6-1-14 workingpreacher.org

Trust this word. In suffering and in glory. In war and in peace. In despair and in hope.

Live by this word. In all moments of our lives.

God has the final word—a word of grace, a word of love, a word of hope that connects us to Christ and to one another. May we hear it, may we believe it, may we obey it, and may we proclaim it, God’s Word alive through our words and through our lives.

To God be the glory! Let us pray.