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“The Shepherd of Sufferers”
Text: 1 Peter 2:19-25 (John 10:1-10)

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

It seems to me that there are two ways to look at and think about life: the way things *ought to be* and the way things *are*. And those two things may be wildly different.

For example, today is the day set aside in our country to honor and celebrate mothers. If you go by what Hallmark says and what you see on TV, this is a day of all smiles and love and togetherness. That is the way things ought to be. The fourth commandment perfectly kept, and not just for one day but every day.

But if you are a mother or ever had a mother - and so I think that includes all of us here today! - you know the way things *are* is often quite different than that. Being a mother is not all smiles and love and togetherness. Being a mother is tough. Being a mother often means suffering. Being a mother often means disappointment, heart ache, failure, guilt, worry, pain, and tears.

The news has given us some examples of that again this week, as we hear of those 276 school girls kidnapped in Nigeria whose whereabouts are still unknown. This week also marked the one year anniversary of those three young ladies in Cleveland who finally escaped after 10 to 12 years of captivity. But for all those well-known and famous stories there are scores of unknown and private pains and struggles, maybe one of which is yours.

But it's not just mothers. For all of us, the way things ought to be and the way things are rarely line up. At home, at work, at school, with family, with friends, with neighbors, there is often disappointment, heart ache, failure, guilt, worry, pain, and tears for all of us. The reality of suffering received because of others and given by us. The reality of how the sin in us and the sin in our world has turned smiles into tears, love into strife, and togetherness into separation.

God told Eve that her pain would be multiplied in childbearing because of sin (Genesis 3). Little did Eve know that was just the beginning of the pain . . .

So it is good for us that Peter addresses suffering in the words we heard from him today. It is good that the Scriptures never try to sugar-coat the Christian life and try to make you

believe that if you're a Christian things will be all rosy and easy. Because if that were true, then none of us are really Christians. Rather, the Christian life - now, after the Fall into sin, as God told Adam and Eve - is one that is filled with suffering. The suffering we bring upon ourselves because of our own sin and stupidity and rebellion (for Peter that would be *suffering justly*), and the suffering brought upon us by the sin of others - even when we do good (Peter calls that *suffering unjustly*).

So suffering is the *reality* - for mothers and for all the rest of us. The question is: *what do you do in the midst of suffering?* And here, Peter provides the answer: **look outside yourself**. If you don't, if you look rather at yourself or inside yourself, you'll either despair and have a pity party over the mess in you and the mess you've made of things, or you will seek revenge and begin plotting how you can make things right according to how you think things should be. Or both. But all either of those things is going to do is just continue the "suffering spiral."

Instead, Peter says, **look outside yourself**. Look at the One who suffered *for* you. Look at the One who suffered for you. Look at Jesus on the cross, *and follow His example*. And His example is this: not just that *when He was reviled He did not revile in return*. And not just that *when He suffered He did not threaten*. But the reason why He did not do those things: because *He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly*. He entrusted Himself to His Father for His life and hope, even while enduring suffering worse than any of us will have to bear - while He was hanging on the cross.

So here's what this means for you - two things: First, when your own sins and failures are weighing heavy on you, your sins and failures as a mother or father, a child or spouse, a worker or student, or any other walk of life, *entrust yourself to Him who judges justly in repentance*. Look outside yourself to Jesus on the cross and see that there, as Peter says, *He Himself bore your sins in His body on the tree*. And if He bore them for you there and took the just judgment of God upon Himself for them there, for you, then God **does not hold them against you**. For you, then, there is forgiveness, and in that forgiveness the freedom not to despair, but to *die to that sin* or those sins, *and live to righteousness*. It is the freedom not to stay stuck in the past, but to live and work toward that rightness of life that God would have for you, and through you for others. To love, not revile. To help, not threaten.

But second, it means this as well: that when the sins and failures of others are weighing heavy on you and you are suffering unjustly for them, *entrust yourself to Him who judges justly in faith*. Again, look outside yourself to Jesus on the cross and see that there, as Peter says this time, *by His wounds you have been healed*. For He was wounded and crushed, He died and rose again, that you who are being wounded and crushed and killed by your own sins and the sins of others might also rise and have life in Him. For whatever is happening, no matter how great the weight, He is stronger. To *maybe* lift it and take it away. But *always* to be with you in it, and to see you through it.

That it not crush you because it cannot crush Him. For He who defeated death and the grave can protect you from whatever evil and sin rises up against you. And thus receiving His healing and strength and life, you are, again, free to love, not revile. To forgive, not threaten.

For, as Peter then concludes this section, *you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

You see, there's one thing every straying sheep can count on, and that's trouble and suffering. Separated from its shepherd, that sheep will not have what it needs and be exposed to the danger of predators. It may make it for a while and if it's lucky, escape predators for a time, but in the end will lose its life. And that's true for us too, who live in a world filled with danger and filled with predators, both physical and spiritual.

But this Sunday, even as we are reminded of the suffering that is in this world, we are also reminded of our Good Shepherd. That we sheep who often stray have a Shepherd who seeks us out. That we sheep who often stray have a Shepherd to whom we can return. That we sheep who often stray have a Shepherd whose goodness and love faileth never (LSB #709 v.1).

He is the One who is not a thief or a robber, those who care only for what they can get for themselves out of the sheep, but the One who loves the sheep and gives Himself for them. *For you*. And so He is the door. The door to repentance, the door to forgiveness, the door to life, the door to hope, the door to heaven, through His death and resurrection. His death and resurrection that gives Baptism the power to give us life as His children, that gives Absolution the power to blot out our sins, and that gives the Supper the power to feed and strengthen us with His own Body and Blood. That what we need we have, what we lack He provide, and when we fail, He fulfill.

And the death and resurrection of Jesus shows us this as well: *that our Father can bring good out of suffering*. That no matter how badly we have screwed things up and no matter how badly we think others have screwed things up for us, your Father in heaven is greater than this too. For what greater screw up was there than to put on our Creator on the cross? And yet what greater good came from that - the life and salvation of the world. And so again, as Peter said - *good advice!* - in all your suffering, in all your screw ups, in all things, *entrust yourself to Him*. To Him who loves you, who forgives you, who died for you, and has promised good to you. He lives to give you that good, maybe in ways you do not expect and cannot imagine. He lives to give you that good, both now and forever.

So if you are a mother celebrating today, or if you are celebrating your mother this day, know how blessed you are. Many mothers, many children, will find no joy this day. And

if that's you - for whatever reason - know our prayers are with you. But no matter who you are, know how blessed you are in Christ. And not just today, but *everyday*.

Which reminds me of the old question children sometimes ask: How come if there's a Mother's Day and a Father's Day but there's no Children's Day? And you know the answer that usually given: *Because every day is Children's Day!* Right? Children never buy that answer! But as a child of God, it's really true. Because every day, in Christ, is a day in His blessing, in His forgiveness, in His life, in His love, and in His care. The care of the Good Shepherd. Who searches for us when we wander, who binds us up when we're wounded, who feeds us when we're hungry, who watches over us when we rest, and who will even be with us when we *pass through the valley of the shadow of death*, that we come out to life on the other side.

So do not fear, little flock (LSB #735). Though we live in a world of suffering and death, where things are not the way they ought to be, the voice of your Shepherd is still sounding forth His forgiveness and life for you. Follow that voice to the font, to the pulpit, and to the altar, to the good and perfect gifts of your Good and perfect Shepherd, until you follow that voice home to heaven. Where the way things ought to be are the ways things are, and will be forever.

For Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.