

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

17<sup>th</sup> May 2020 – Sixth Sunday of Easter

**I PETER 3:13-17**

**FAITHFULLY WITNESSING TO OUR HOPE**

Do you ever feel that you get in trouble for doing the right thing? Mmm, although I can't see you I am guessing that there are quite a few nods going on there, and perhaps even some sly looks towards at least one of the people you may be with right now. So, I need to qualify the question a bit more. I'm not talking about when we twist both the facts and the reasons for what we have done so that it makes it look like we acted in the right way and for the right reasons (I know I have been there many times), but when we get in trouble for having genuinely acted in a way we believe is right. When we think about it, I'm sure we can all think of instances when we have been in that situation also.

Although we like to knock them a lot, one group of people who often find themselves in this situation is our political leaders. I'm not saying that they are always perfect, but in our country we can be thankful that most of our political leaders, on all levels of government, are doing what they believe is right for us all according to the philosophical or political stand they are coming from. The reality is that when you make decisions for a wide group of people you cannot and will not make everyone happy, no matter how well intentioned you may be. We see a perfect example of this right now, when, as our leaders both federally and on a state level try to protect us all from the pandemic, they try to make decisions to protect our lives and our health, our mental wellbeing, the wider economy, individual businesses and our own employment, as well as all the other factors which are always in there. Not an easy job, and then both we and their fellow politicians criticise them and question their motives when the balance isn't as we believe it should be! It is hard to keep everyone happy, even when you genuinely believe you are doing what is right.

We can place ourselves into this also. In our lives; as parents, in our relationships, as family members, at work, among friends, in our community, even at church, you will be able to think of times when you made a decision or acted in a way you believed was right and for the good of everyone, but still

you were either criticised, abused, ridiculed, or shunned because of it. Not an easy thing to face, is it, even though it is a part of life for us all? It can cause us to question our beliefs and our motives. We don't always know how to respond to situations like this.

It is this being criticised and condemned for doing what is right that Peter addresses in our reading here. We need to qualify it though; he's not talking about us getting into trouble for just any situation, but he is particularly addressing when we suffer because we make decisions and act in ways that are based on our Christian faith. It is about when we live our lives in faithful witness and we then get into trouble, or face ridicule or rejection from others. It is when the witness of our lives leads to suffering.

How and when can this happen for us? In our country, thank God, we don't have to fear official persecution for our faith in the way that Christians in some other countries do, but being true to our faith can still at times make us be under pressure we would rather not have. Think about some of the occasions when you might find yourself in this situation, perhaps even daily: maybe striving to be honest in your business dealings or your employment when others are telling you to make decisions which benefit you first; forgiving someone or accepting them even though their attitude or behaviour continues to worry or annoy you; doing all you can, putting yourself out, to improve a relationship with someone close to you; helping and giving when no one notices and praises you for it; not joining in with talk or actions which don't bear good witness to your faith; boldly but calmly speaking against any instances of racism, sexism, or any views which make out that others are less than ourselves; and I am sure you can come up with others. All actions which can potentially have other people judge us, criticise us, cast us aside.

In looking at the fact that witnessing to our Christian faith can sometimes bring us suffering, Peter gives us in this reading what is really a: What? How? And Why? Not to downplay what we can go through now, but remember that the people his words were originally written to faced suffering that included being arrested, whipped, and even being thrown to the lions for their faith. So, what does what he writes here have to say to us in our lives today?

The What? Peter reminds us here, as if we need reminding, that as Christians even in our relatively safe times we will sometimes experience reactions from others because of our faith that we don't like or

enjoy. But what he focuses on here is the opportunity to witness to our faith, to share with others the hope we live in, that even these negative experiences give us. As much as it is easier to say than do, he says to us; <sup>13</sup>Can anyone really harm you for being eager to do good deeds? <sup>14</sup>Even if you have to suffer for doing good things, God will bless you. So stop being afraid and don't worry about what people might do.' (*I Peter 3:13-14 CEV*) Whatever you go through, trust God and be ready to witness to Him.

And then, the How? <sup>15</sup>Honour Christ and let him be the Lord of your life. Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope. <sup>16</sup>Give a kind and respectful answer and keep your conscience clear.' (*I Peter 3:15-16a CEV*) Don't react. Don't come across as someone who is pious and superior, as we Christians sometimes do. Let your actions and your words, your life, give a true and honest witness to what you believe, and be prepared to share the hope you have in God, in a kind and loving way, when you have the opportunity.

Finally, the Why? 'This way you will make people ashamed for saying bad things about your good conduct as a follower of Christ. <sup>17</sup>You are better off to obey God and suffer for doing right than to suffer for doing wrong.' (*I Peter 3:16b-17 CEV*) The word 'ashamed' here is not the best translation in the wider context. It's not about being able to say to people, 'Hah, I told you so!', but about helping people come to see and know God through us. Why do we sometimes have to speak and act in ways that make us stand out from others? Why do we respond to the negative of reactions of others in ways that are loving, forgiving, respectful? So that they too can come to know God, the hope He brings into our lives, and the love He has for us all.

The greatest example of how this plays out in someone's life is....? Jesus. Think about What Jesus did in being faithful in all He did, always being criticised and plotted against for faithfully following God, and finally as the true innocent One being crucified. Think How Jesus always accepted and forgave people, including praying, 'Father, forgive them' for those who nailed Him to the cross. Think about Why Jesus did this, about the witness His faithful life gave to others, and how people came to God by seeing His faith lived out in His life.

To get in trouble sometimes for doing what we believe is right is a part of life. To suffer some kind of hardship at times for being faithful to the belief and hope you have in God is a part of our Christian lives. Thank God that we know He is with us at these times. Ask for His forgiveness when we do fail to be faithful in this witness. Pray that, through the example and strength we have in Jesus, He will continue to help us to be both humble and faithful in our witness so that He can use us to bring others to know the hope we have in Him also. Amen.

**Prayer:** Thank you, Lord God, that You give us hope in our lives. Be with us for the times we struggle with the hard times our faith gives us. Guide us and lead us in the way we follow and witness to You each day. Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION**

#### **'Suffering' in our lives**

Peter speaks of 'suffering' for our faith as being a part of our Christian life, and this is probably our experience also, at one time or another.

- What are some occasions or situations in which your faith has meant you have had to make difficult decisions, not do things you wanted to do, or perhaps led to you coping criticism from others?
- How do you go with handling these situations? Have you got better at it over time? Do any things still get to you? Have you found any particular ways that help you?

#### **Witnessing to our hope**

'Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope.' (*1 Peter 3:15b CEV*)

- What do you think is meant by 'witnessing' nowadays? Is it boldly speaking out our faith, or quietly living it out? Can it be both?
- How do you witness in either of these ways, or in a different way?

#### **Jesus the Lord of our life**

'Honour Christ and let him be the Lord of your life.' (*1 Peter 3:15a CEV*)

A big call here from Peter. To honour Christ as the Lord over all of our life means that bringing glory and worship to Him guides and governs all of our thoughts, words and actions.

- What challenges does this bring to you? Do you find it easy, or difficult?
- When you struggle with this, as most of us do, what do you do/could you do to help you?
- What does it mean for you to know that Jesus freely forgives you in your struggles and failings? Does that help you in following Him?

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