

Sunday April 30th, 2023

Easter IV

1 Peter 2:19-25

“Tangled in the Nets”

The story goes that a pastor had just announced to the congregation that he would be leaving their church. There was a good deal of crying and lots of kind words. As the pastor stopped to console one woman who seemed overly upset, he kindly offered these words. “Oh, don’t feel bad. I’m sure the search committee will come up with a much better replacement.” It was then she turned to him and replied, “Oh, that’s what they said the last time. In fact, that is what they say every time, but it never happens.”

No matter how puffed up we get there is always someone quick to try and let the air out. One of my favourite proverbial sayings is, “Know your lane and stay within it.” Most often when we get tangled up in the nets of life it’s because we have ventured into areas, we know nothing about. Knowing your own limitations is good. When you look for a hero—someone to emulate, someone to be your example—you want to find a person you actually can learn from and follow. Whom do you choose?

In your job—in your field of expertise—perhaps you look for someone from whom you realize you have something to learn. Someone, perhaps, who manages to get better results than you currently do. Results aside, maybe the person who serves as your example, just has a better outlook on life; somehow, he or she is able to be cheerful, regardless of the circumstances.

It is a simple fact that only a few people reach the very, very top of any profession. If you are expecting exactly the same results in your life that the person you seek to emulate achieved, you are likely to be disappointed. There is also no doubt that the individual you place on a pedestal is flawed. Look hard enough and the people you have chosen to be your examples in life will let you down. Outwardly things may appear glamorous, but there are deep secrets lurking beneath the surface.

In fact, even the examples given to us in the Bible show limitations. In talking about faith, Hebrews 11 gives many examples of people who lived by faith, people like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We can think of many more. Heroes of the faith like King David, who wrote many of the Psalms. People like the Apostle Paul, or even people like Peter, who was the writer of today’s Second Lesson that serves as our sermon text today.

They are heroes of the faith, but every one of them was a flawed human being. The Apostle Paul called himself the Chief of Sinners; Peter denied he ever knew Jesus; King David went to extremes to cover up his adultery; Abraham tried to pass off his wife as his sister because he was afraid. Every one of these “heroes of the faith” was a deeply flawed individual. Every one of them had limitations.

When you read about the flawed heroes of the faith, do you ever wonder why God had so many of their flaws written down and recorded for posterity? Do you wonder why some of those heroes of the faith themselves wrote about their own flaws so poignantly and so honestly, laying bare everything for all the world to see? A person has got to know their limitations!

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Each of us must realize there are some things we just cannot do—we don't have the knowledge; we don't have the skill set. We need, to stay in our lane.

People today have recognized the value of specializing for exactly this reason; let the professionals do what they are good at, and I'll stick to areas of my own expertise and ability. Then...along comes Peter and he says this: "If you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God. Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:20-21).

However, before we unpack this concept, we need to observe something we might be inclined to overlook. These words written by Peter were addressed to whom? To Christians in general or maybe a more specific group of believers. What does verse 18 say?" Slaves accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only for those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh."

These words appear, right after Peter commends his readers to "honour everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor". It is very interesting that Peter begins in verse 18 giving instructions to specific groups of Christians, beginning in verse 18. Peter didn't start by addressing the most prestigious group of Christians, instead, he addressed the most vulnerable. The group addressed in verses 18-25 are *oiketai*.

This word is often translated as "slaves" in English translations, but the Greek word used here is not the typical word for slaves (*douloi*). *Oiketai*, used in verse 18, really refers to domestic or household servants. These people were probably slaves, but some may have been free men and women.

We might be shocked to learn that as much as a third of the population of the first-century Greco-Roman world may have been slaves. It was not unusual for slaves to be well educated and reasonably well-treated. However, slaves were the property of their masters and vulnerable to exploitation and every form of abuse.

Despite their precarious situation, Peter told the household servants to submit to their masters. The participle form of "submit" in verse 18 carries on the theme of submission introduced by the verb for "submit" in 1 Peter 2:13. Peter assures the servants that God's grace, that is, his favour, is upon them if they put up with unjust treatment. This unjust treatment included being beaten.

This does not mean that Christians should seek opportunities for suffering so that they might experience God's grace. It is simply sensible to avoid suffering. But if suffering is unavoidable, as it was for the Christian servants in Asia Minor, we can depend on God's grace, favour, or commendation.[4] (The NIV translates "grace" as "commendable".) It is an honour, even a gift, to suffer for the sake of our faith in God (cf. Phil. 1:29)

First of all, Peter points to something I don't like very much—suffering. Then he tells me that Jesus suffered to give me an example, so that I could follow in his steps! There was a saying that was popular a few years ago—I don't see it quite so much anymore.

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The saying was “What would Jesus do?” Peter’s words are telling me that Jesus left me an example to follow and that makes me feel very nervous. Rick Warren (“Purpose Driven”) accurately observes: “We can measure our servant’s heart by how we respond when others treat us like servants. How do you react when you’re taken for granted, bossed around, treated as an inferior...?”

Most of us have probably had the experience of a difficult boss or supervisor at work. Someone that no matter what you do insists on making your life difficult or simply treats you unfairly because they know you are a Christian and they want to get under your skin to see how you will react. We might even think that we are within our rights to retaliate against these kinds of people, but the Gospel calls us to a higher standard.

I cannot follow Jesus’ example. Neither can you. A person has got to know their limitations. Peter’s next words, paraphrasing verses from Isaiah 53, show it. “He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth” ([1 Peter 2:22](#)). Jesus never, ever, committed a sin. No deceit was in his mouth. Jesus didn’t tell little white lies to make things easier for himself. He didn’t resort to trickery.

You and I think nothing of telling a little white lie to make things go more smoothly with a spouse or a boss or a police officer. We can’t live up to Jesus’ example. “When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” ([1 Peter 2:23](#)). Human nature is to give as good as we get—really, we give as bad as we get.

If someone says something mean to us, we want to retaliate with harsh words, too. Insults have started fights; on a grand scale, insults even start wars. Jesus didn’t lash back with biting words at those who insulted him or spit on him. He never made any threats. Rather, he prayed—even from the cross—for those who threatened and beat and insulted him. There is no way you or I could live up to his perfect example.

“He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree” ([1 Peter 2:24](#)). God’s punishment for every single sin is eternal death. Jesus carried them all—every sin—to the cross. I can’t pay the price of my own sins. One of my sins would cost me eternity in hell. I’m doomed. A person has got to know their limitations. How can Peter say: “Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps” ([1 Peter 2:21](#))? I cannot do it. Jesus is not an example I can follow. How can Peter speak this way?

Look again at the list of things Jesus did that you and I cannot do. “He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness.

By his wounds you were healed” ([1 Peter 2:22-24](#)). Look at the end. Jesus did all those things “so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness.” A person has got to know their limitations. Jesus knew our limitations. He knew that we could not live up to the Heavenly

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Father's expectations. He knew that, left to our own devices, we would be remain lost and devoid of any hope.

As the Athanasian Creed summarizes the incarnation, "Our Lord Jesus Christ also took on human flesh." The writer to the Hebrews says he was "Tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin" ([Hebrews 4:15](#)). Even the limitations of the human form couldn't stop our Savior. Jesus did it all. "So that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness" ([1 Peter 2:24](#)). That was what the Heavenly Father wanted all along for his people.

Martin Luther says it this way: "[God] sent His Son into the world, heaped all the sins of all men upon Him, and said to Him: 'Be Peter the denier; Paul the persecutor, blasphemer, and assaulter; David the adulterer; the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise; the thief on the cross. In short, be the person of all men, the one who has committed the sins of all men. And see to it that You pay and make satisfaction for them'" (Luther's Works, Vol. 26 p. 280).

"What would Jesus do?" I don't need an example; I need a Savior. So do you. Jesus was that, Savior. Jesus is that, Savior. He purchased and won salvation for you. Back to Peter's assertion: "Indeed, you were called to do this [suffer, as mentioned in the previous verse], because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps" ([1 Peter 2:21](#)).

Our Lord Jesus is an example we can follow. We can follow because his work redeems us and empowers us. When Peter listed what Jesus did to win our salvation for us, he does so as a motivating factor. The Christian no longer feels a sense of obligation to follow the example of Jesus. Instead, there is a desire to follow Jesus because of the great love he displayed toward us on the cross.

We follow Jesus in humility. Grateful for the way Jesus fulfilled the words of Isaiah 53 and suffered in silence, taking the insults and the threats without retaliation, Christians can learn to bite our tongues when insulted and threatened because of our faith. Jesus did everything for our salvation so that "We would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness" ([1 Peter 2:24](#)). Following Christ is not a moral decision on our part. Instead, we have experienced a rebirth.

"He left you an example," Peter told us. A man's got to know his limitations. Knowing our limitations is why the Christian comes back to the well of God's Word again and again to be refreshed and renewed. Knowing our own limitations is why the Christian realizes we can never earn any part of God's favor. Knowing our own limitations is why we look to Jesus to live in us, so that our Christ-like actions might lead others to know him better, too.

In *The Christian Leader*, Don Ratzlaff retells a story Vernon Grounds came across in Ernest Gordon's *Miracle on the River Kwai*. The Scottish soldiers, forced by their Japanese captors to labor on a jungle railroad, had degenerated to barbarous behavior, but one afternoon something happened. A shovel was missing. The officer in charge became enraged. He demanded that the missing shovel be produced, or else. When nobody in the squadron budged, the officer got his gun and threatened to kill them all on the spot . . . It was obvious the officer meant what he had said. Then, finally, one man stepped forward.

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The officer put away his gun, picked up a shovel, and beat the man to death. When it was over, the survivors picked up the bloody corpse and carried it with them to the second tool check. This time, no shovel was missing. Indeed, there had been a miscount at the first check point. The word spread like wildfire through the whole camp. An innocent man had been willing to die to save the others! . . . The incident had a profound effect. . . The men began to treat each other like brothers.

When the victorious Allies swept in, the survivors, human skeletons, lined up in front of their captors. And instead of attacking their captors these former prisoners who had experienced such awful abuse, insisted they would no longer hate their barbarous captors. There would be no more killing. Now what we need is forgiveness.

None of us can ever live up to the example Christ set for us. But, by his grace and strength, we can achieve moments when our stated love of Christ, is more than just words, but a defining point of our character. And a shining example to the world that we are dead to sin and alive to righteousness.