

Scriptures: Acts 17:22-31; 1 Peter 3:13-22

Mother's Day

Moms, like Boy Scouts, are typically always ready. Have you noticed that? As a child, you fall and scrape your knee riding a bicycle, go in the house, and Mom, Grandma, an aunt, or some other mother-figure is ready to help clean your skinned up knee, bandage you up, and send you back out to play. So happy Mother's Day! Mother's Day originated a little over a hundred years ago, in a Methodist Church in West Virginia, when a lady wanted to recognize her mom during a worship service. The idea took off, and we've been doing it ever since. Other countries of the world even celebrate it. Our moms do a lot for us!

In the Scriptures, we encounter some exemplary mothers. Mary, the mother of Jesus, comes to mind immediately. She was willing to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, so that God could birth the Christ through her. On this Mother's Day, I wonder what it is that our Heavenly Father would like to birth through us today? That's a good question for us to ponder, as individuals this week. "What is it that God wants to birth through me to display Christ's glory, for the sake of others?" Today we're going to take a look at Peter's first letter, where he lays out some foundational things about the Christian faith. Turn with me to 1 Peter 3:13-22. **Read 1 Peter 3:13-22.**

Interactions with Other People

Prior to the section of chapter 3 we just read, Peter's been writing about how people are supposed to interact with each other. He provides instructions on how husbands and wives ought to treat each other. The bottom line is that wives are supposed to honor and respect their husbands, and husbands are supposed to honor and respect their wives. Marriage, by God's design, is meant to be a mutually loving and supporting relationship. That speaks into what Peter talks about next. That we should be kind, and compassionate – "so we may inherit a blessing," (1 Pet. 3:9).

He then elaborates – and this is the part we heard – on why we should conduct our lives the way Christ calls us to. Peter says, "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear what they fear,'" or some manuscripts read, "'Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened,'" (verses 13-14). See friends, when we're doing good – when we're being kind and compassionate to all people – we've got no reason to expect anyone to harm us. If we humbly follow Christ, and really let Him rule over us – over our wills, and that's a tall order, to be sure – we let Him completely be King, people aren't going to harm us, because we'd be doing everything in our power to help them in whatever their endeavors may be, assuming they align with God's will.

Let Jesus Rule In Us

See, this is what Peter's saying in a nutshell with what he says next. He writes, "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord," (verse 15a), in other words, let Jesus be King of our hearts and lives. "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander," (verses 15b-16). Now look, you know the old saying, "you attract more flies with honey than vinegar." It's true. If we see someone's lifestyle, and disagree with it, then say something to them to the effect that they're on the highway to Hell – it turns them off. They check out. They're done – and we've wasted a golden opportunity to share the gospel of Christ.

It's by far better to befriend them, and show them through our lives, as living examples, and through the way we treat them, the right way to live. Doing it that way brings about drastic change – granted, it may be a gradual change that happens by degrees – but eventually they aren't going to resemble the person they used to be when we met them. Instead, they'll be the person God originally intended them to be. In loving people – even those who are presently unlovable and undeserving of our love, we may suffer. Peter says, "It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil," (verse 17).

This is precisely what Jesus did for us at the cross. "For Christ died for sins once for all, the Righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit," (verse 18), some manuscripts say there "He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit." Peter goes on, "through whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built," (verses 19-20a). Have you heard the traditional version of the Apostles' Creed? Check out page 881 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*. See that section about Jesus? It says:

"And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hell. The third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

The Depths of His Love Cannot Be Plumbed

See, Jesus didn't just die for your sins and my sins – He died for the sins of every human being who ever existed in history, and who will ever exist in ages to come. He died on the cross. And they laid His body in the borrowed tomb. Peter writes that Jesus, though dead, "went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah." When God destroyed the world with the Great Flood, only eight people survived – Noah, his wife, his sons, and their

wives – on the ark. So all those people living on the earth in that age were wiped out. They died. And Jesus – during those three days while His body lay dead in the tomb – went to Hell to rescue them from sin and death. That’s where the line, “He descended into Hell,” comes from.

Can you imagine that? He loves people so much, that not only was He willing to endure death on the cross, but He was also willing to face the fury of Hell to free the souls held there in bondage. The depths of Christ’s love for us – for all people – cannot be plumbed. If it were an ocean, it would be bottomless. If it were the heavens – it would go out, far beyond the farthest star. As the hymnist wrote long ago, “Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus, Vast unmeasured, boundless, free; Rolling as a mighty ocean, In its fullness over me.”

Peter gives us a history lesson about the Great Flood. He writes, “In it [the ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into Heaven and is at God’s right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him,” (verses 20b-22). Peter’s explaining that through the symbolic waters of baptism, the destructive force of the Holy Spirit puts our old selves to death with Christ, and we are made a new people – reborn in His own image.

It’s comforting to know that the One who loved us enough to lay down His own life is right now at the right hand of the Father, interceding on behalf of us. See, He’s not sitting there, looking at us, and screaming, “Oh! You sinned! You messed up this time!” He’s there saying, “He’s mine. She’s mine. Yes, they mess up, but I’ve paid the price.” That’s a good word that even the most sin-filled, unlovable person can respond to in a positive, life-changing way. In closing, I want to circle back to that question I asked you earlier, friends. What is it that God wants to birth through me – and you – that displays Christ’s glory, for the sake of others? Let’s pray.

Prayer: Loving and gracious God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ You bring us out to a spacious place where we are called to live as those redeemed. Empower us by Your Spirit to keep Your commandments, that we may show forth Your love with gentle word and humble deed to all Your people. Amen.