

**1 PETER 2:19-25**  
**YOUR GOOD SHEPHERD**

Jesus says that His sheep hear the voice of their Shepherd, and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them. Today He calls Andrew, Hannah, and Jessica.

Who is this Shepherd of our souls, not just for our three confirmands, but for all of us here today, all of those near and far off? Today is not only a Confirmation Sunday, but today is also known as Good Shepherd Sunday. So really our text is the Shepherd in all of our texts, with us focusing specially on 1 Peter and Psalm 23.

In 1 Peter we begin by looking at our suffering, whether for doing bad, or for doing good. If you bear up under a punishment for doing bad that's of no credit to you. You deserved that punishment, and maybe it should be made harder next time, if you need to be punished again, so that you don't need to be punished again. Yet, then Peter tells us that if we suffer for doing good and endure it, that's a gracious thing in God's eye's

No one likes to be punished for something they didn't do. That's not what Peter is talking about, but rather being punished for doing good, which seems even worse. We don't really suffer for being Christians in this country, like people do in other countries where they get arrested or beheaded for just going to church. Yet, still try to imagine being arrested for living out your Christian faith.

What if you got home from the store and found something in your bag that you didn't pay for? As a Christian you return to the store to pay for it, or return the item. Yet, instead of the store being grateful for your honesty they have you arrested for shoplifting. It wasn't your fault, you didn't steal the item, the clerk put it in your bag. But still you're the one being charged.

You may have had your own experience of being punished for doing something good. How did you react? Did you react in anger? Did you say you would never do that kind thing again. We do have a saying that no good deed goes unpunished, because these things do happen. We sometimes suffer because we did a random act of kindness, but our kindness wasn't appreciated, or it was taken advantage of.

Our reading looks at how you should respond when something bad happens to you because you did something good; you were called to suffer for doing good according to your faith. Jesus suffered for you, and when it comes to our response to suffering Jesus left us an example so that we may follow in His steps.

Now, here's where it gets really hard to be a Christian. After Peter says that Jesus left us an example to follow, he says that Jesus committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. Okay, no deceit, no lying about the situation to try to save yourself from suffering, but committing no sin!? This is a very hard example to follow. No deceit, no insulting, no threatening, just entrusting yourself to God who'll judge the situation justly.

How well do you think you can follow this example if bad things start happening to you because you were doing good things? Maybe you can get away without lying about the situation, or insulting or threatening those who hurt you, but maybe still you think bad insulting thoughts about them, or speak those insults about them to others. You know how you've reacted to any unjust suffering that you've experienced. You know how you've sinned.

That's why Peter has to go on and say that Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross. We do sin. We don't follow Jesus' example. So Jesus was crucified for us because we cannot even avoid the little sins such as lying, threatening and insulting. We find it hard to entrust our lives to God. We want control over our lives, and we tell God how He should be acting if He wants us to keep coming to church.

On that note of continuing to come to church, the confirmands made a promise to God today, last year's confirmands made the same promise, and you made the same promise to God when you were confirmed, and that promise is that the only thing that will keep you away from church on Sunday is death. Sadly, the death rate in our church is very high.

This is not why Jesus died on the cross for you, so that you may die to God, but rather Peter says Jesus bore your sins on the cross so that you might die to sin. Thou shalt remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy – the third commandment. So many do not remember the Sabbath day, and they do not live to righteousness.

Will the next time that I see them be at their funeral? Maybe then their family will hear Psalm 23, because many people ask for Psalm 23 to be read at funerals. Yet, Psalm 23 isn't just for funerals. It was read today, which in a sense is a funeral for the confirmands. They're being reminded to die to sin. However, Psalm 23 is also for life, as you're also being reminded to live to righteousness.

You'll stray at times in your Christian faith, as last year's confirmands have strayed, but then again you'll be called by God to return to the Lord Your God, to return to the Shepherd of your souls. And that's what Psalm 23 is, a call to return to the Lord your God. A reminder as to why it's good to return to Jesus your Shepherd.

This is a song of gratitude, confidence and hope, and it's also a prayer. Yet, this isn't a prayer like the Lord's prayer. Both are good, but both are very different. One begins with "Our Father", the other begins with "The Lord is my Shepherd." One we pray together and for one another, the other one is individual. It's for me. It's for you. You can put your name in this Psalm as our Gospel tells us that Jesus calls His sheep by name.

Jesus makes Andrew lie down in green pastures. Jesus leads Hannah beside still waters. Jesus restores Jessica's soul. That's what the Shepherd of your souls does, He restores your soul. After you sin Jesus restores you. He gives you an example to follow so that you may not sin, but because you do sin, He takes that sin upon Himself to the cross and dies for it, and then He encourages you to die to sin, and to live for righteousness.

Yet we do these things so poorly that our Shepherd has to lead us in the path of righteousness itself. He takes you by the hand and guides you and tells you that this is the way that you should be living. No lying, no insulting, no threatening, but instead leaving all judgement of the unjust behaviour of others up to God.

That will be hard at times. At times it will feel like you're walking through the valley of the shadow of death when people are unkind to you. However, you'll come to not fear the mean or evil things that people do to you, say to you, say about you, or threaten you with, because Jesus is with you.

Now there's a change here in the Psalm that can be hard to see if it's not right before you, and even then because this Psalm is so often read the change can be missed. It starts off with He restores my soul, but in verse four it changes to You are with me. In the middle of the Psalm it becomes more personal. There's a personal love from God to you described here that will never be taken away from you. No matter what changes happen in your life, God's love will always be there for you.

Now you're not just recounting God's good deeds, but you're praying to Him personally. He personally comes to you in your suffering. He knows you personally, and He suffered for you personally. In confirmation you develop that more personal relationship with Jesus. Throughout life in the more painful moments Jesus becomes more personal to you – in a suicide, in a breakup of a marriage, in the loss of a child – Jesus walks through these crises with you. You have a God who doesn't abandon you.

No matter what suffering you experience, even if it's the unjust suffering that Peter talks about, it can actually reveal more of God to you as He draws close to you in a personal way. His goodness and mercy will pursue you all the days of your life, and you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.