



“Following Jesus”

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Scripture (ICB):

1 Peter 2:19-25

¹⁹ A person might have to suffer even when he has done nothing wrong. But if he thinks of God and bears the pain, this pleases God. ²⁰ If you are punished for doing wrong, there is no reason to praise you for bearing punishment. But if you suffer for doing good, and you are patient, then that pleases God. ²¹ That is what you were called to do. Christ suffered for you. He gave you an example to follow. So you should do as he did.

²² “He did no sin.

He never lied.” [*Isaiah 53:9*](#)

²³ People insulted Christ, but he did not insult them in return. Christ suffered, but he did not threaten. He let God take care of him. God is the One who judges rightly. ²⁴ Christ carried our sins in his body on the cross. He did this so that we would stop living for sin and start living for what is right. And we are healed because of his wounds. ²⁵ You were like sheep that went the wrong way. But now you have come back to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They spent their time learning the apostles’ teaching. And they continued to share, to break bread, and to pray together.

⁴³ The apostles were doing many miracles and signs. And everyone felt great respect for God. ⁴⁴ All the believers stayed together. They shared everything. ⁴⁵ They sold their land and the things they owned. Then they divided the money and gave it to those people who needed it. ⁴⁶ The believers met together in the Temple every day. They all had the same purpose. They broke bread in their homes, happy to share their food with joyful hearts.

⁴⁷ They praised God, and all the people liked them. More and more people were being saved every day; the Lord was adding those people to the group of believers.

Sermon:

I have been weeding, weeding, weeding. I bet you have been, too; so much rain, and now warmer days and nights have come and this is what we get...lots of weeds. I have flowers, and weeds. I have early tomato and pepper plants, and weeds. I have grass and rose bushes, and weeds.

All my gardening treasures grow up with and around weeds.

Scripture is kind of like that for me. I am not sure if what I am reading is a flower or a weed. This text from Peter is surely like that.

This text is an object lesson in learning to study the bible, not just read it, but study with it, struggle with it, question it, debate with it.

In vs. 18, which the lectionary skipped over, we hear really upsetting words of the writer, encouraging slaves to be submissive and obedient, with a good master or an evil master! And in this passage, we hear the writer encouraging the believer to endure beating, if necessary. We don't believe in slavery, or in beatings!

Nothing in me wants to lift up a text like this, as a source of life inspiration. On the face of it, it seems unhealthy. I would never use scripture to encourage someone to stay in an abusive relationship, but I know this text has been used that way.

So, shall we just ignore it? Progressive Christians can surely move on to a different passage of scripture; as a progressive pastor, I can surely pick a better text than this?!

I know I have in the past.

But as we become more and more post Christian, post scriptural people, we probably need to pay attention to scripture even more.

We are grounded in scripture, without being literalists about it. We trust in Jesus and seek to follow him in life and witness, without being slavish imitators of Jesus.

For example; to be a disciple of Jesus in our day, you don't have to be a Jewish male!

So this text, which is so distasteful to our ears, may yet have some flowers amongst the weeds. Perhaps it can help us if we know a little context: this letter comes to a small early band of Jewish followers, receiving this letter in their villages in a part of the Roman Empire that is now modern day Turkey.

This small band of followers are Jewish, and trying to practice their religion, which is Jewish, but still becoming ever more different than Judaism, they are trying to follow Jesus in peace. But the neighbors view them with suspicion.

The entire Roman Empire recognized that the religion of the people undergirded the power of the state...worshiping the Roman gods, offering incense or prayers was a sign of loyalty and citizenship. There was no separation of church and state for them!

These folks are trying to figure out how to live in the empire without capitulating to it. They have their unique community of love and care, of sharing in common, of eating and drinking together and praying together...and it is not the same as the neighbors. Some of them are slaves. None of them are the wealthy or powerful.

Lest they be driven out of their towns, their homes and jobs...they need to show they are peaceable and gentle, not trying to overthrow the empire. The emphasis of this letter is on living peacefully in the society around them.

But it never capitulates to violence, no, it does not. Listen to this commentary: "Making the distinction between suffering for a just cause and suffering for an unjust cause, this text teases a qualified sanction for suffering under certain circumstances. Nowhere does it suggest that suffering is a legitimate condition for those who are abused, coerced, or oppressed. Nowhere does it suggest a stoic tolerance for violence against anyone. Nowhere does it suggest that God's name be invoked as the hand strikes or the belt comes out or the vestments come off." Joy Douglas Strome

It is in study and struggle with this piece of scripture that we can appreciate it in its own historic context.

But does it govern the practice of our faith?

Scripture, in its variety and complexity of forms, must be discerned carefully.

The wisdom of your own life and living,
the wisdom of the community of believers,
the wisdom of reading the breadth and depth of scripture,
the wisdom of your personal experience of the mystery of God...
all this must come into play as you seek to understand, to accept and to live as a follower of Jesus.

I recognize the power of the message of this passage, for me. It says that suffering for one's desire to live as a follower of Jesus is part of being a follower of Jesus.

Jesus came to build the Kingdom, but it wasn't easy. And Jesus had enemies, and so will we. Jesus upset the culture of his time, and we must each discern, for our own time, what we are willing to upset, because we follow Jesus.

Are you willing to upset your relationships at work because you follow Jesus?

What if you work for Immigration and Customs Enforcement? What if you are an undocumented worker?

What if you work with people on Medicaid, vulnerable children, elders, those with pre-existing conditions?

What if you have power in the Legislature?

Are we willing to challenge our culture and our government because we follow Jesus?
I Peter says that suffering like Jesus, is not the thing to fear, but rather, losing our connection with him, and losing our hope in him, and losing our power to stand with him in changing the world in to the Kingdom of peace and hope, justice and kindness...this is what we should fear.

Other churches may despise us, people may harass us, tag our building with graffiti, send us hate mail (these have all happened at one time or another) but we continue to read scripture and discern how we shall follow Jesus.

On this, Immigrant Rights Sunday in the UCC, it means Westminster is discerning how to participate in the Sanctuary movement. It means a lot of us are sending emails, phone calls and letters of anger and concern to Rep. McMorris Rogers.
It means we struggle to comfort one another at the news of the death of Chuck Fisk this past week.

This is following Jesus, and while we want to be at peace with one another and in our city...we will not scorn the reality of the cost of following Jesus.

Hear this again:

²³ People insulted Christ, but he did not insult them in return. Christ suffered, but he did not threaten. He let God take care of him. God is the One who judges rightly.

It's a high bar that is set by Jesus Christ. It is a life of high commitment and passion. It is a life of compassion, mercy, truth telling, generosity, and inclusion.

It is a life dedicated to God's call of shalom, God's intention of life in its fullness, God's power to make a way where there is no way, to bring resurrection life out of the jaws of death.

How do I know this? I read scripture.

How do I live this? By discerning Jesus' mission and God's design, from life and from scripture.

How do I follow Jesus? By listening with my heart, studying with my mind, and praying with my whole will.

And that includes texts like this. Texts I don't like and don't take wholeheartedly into my life and ministry. Texts that must be read, and challenged...as I follow Jesus.