

Sunday 30th May 2021

1 Peter 2:18-25 (Be healed)

Talk by Russell Jones, Prayers by Kemi Ogundipe

Good morning and welcome to our morning worship. We'll continue to read through the book of 1st Peter and think about what it means for us, and today's passage concerns times when we are mistreated by those in charge. It is easy in those situations not to respond as God has called us to do. Peter offers some advice and reasoning about that, as we'll hear later.

First Kemi will lead us in our intercessions

Prayers

Let us pray to our heavenly father.

Lord, in these few moments of stillness, we bring before you our prayers. Father, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love, with those who love him and keep his commandment, we have sinned and done wrong, we have turned away from your commands and laws, forgive us, and renew a right Spirit in us.

Faithful God, your son Jesus Christ gave us a new commandment of love for each other and so we ask you to teach us to love you in our neighbours that by serving them, we might also serve ourselves and you.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Mighty God, we pray for your church which day by day gathers to praise you and to hear your Holy word, we pray for your people worshipping around the world in rural churches, great city and on the internet, give us in Holy Trinity and St John a sense of expectation as we come and inspiration as we go.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we pray for your church, that all those who trust Jesus, will be by your Spirit to follow his humility, to imitate his life, to welcome and not to condemn, help us your church to be like Jesus.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, you know the need of your church, as we search for a minister, appoint us someone who will be a great commission leader, and our church to be a great commission church, that make disciples.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we pray for our nations and leaders, give our leaders wisdom, that they may be able to do things, beyond their understanding, help them to choose the right path, when they make decisions, on behalf of nations, give them grace and courage, to make sound decisions that align with your will for our nations.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we pray for our CAP centre that people throughout Penge community will be aware of CAP's work and feel inspired to support by volunteering and clients with health, relationship or other problems are given the strength to manage their situations with the help of other agencies. We ask that the holy Spirit to lead and strengthen Rachael, Lynn and Gareth as they help their clients out of debt.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

God of faithfulness, your generous love supplies us with all that we need, we know that all that we have is yours. We thank you for the work that you have done in our church through foodbank by the means of generous support of many people, we pray for your blessings on all those who give and receive, help the food to get to those who need it most.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we pray for those in need in our church and our community, the sick, and dying, the elderly, lonely or uncertain, for people who need healing, for all finding life painful, ill and vulnerable, we ask for comfort for Keith and Barbara, healing for Antony, Audrey, Alison Sister and Sister-in-law, Lorraine, Gerese, Val and Will.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we pray for those who have died, due to coronavirus and other illness, and those who have reached the natural end of a long life, we think of those we have loved, but see no longer, who live on in our memories, loving God, be with all who mourn and surround them with your love, that they may not be overwhelmed by their loss, but have confidence in your goodness and strength to meet the days to come.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Let us pray for our church, and all who pray.

May our homes be places of worship and prayer, where your love is shown and shared, help us to make you known in every place we go and bear witness to the gospel with acts of faith and hope and love.

Merciful father accepts these prayers for the sake of your son our saviour Jesus Christ.

In unity we say together the prayer our saviour Jesus Christ taught us.

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,**

Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and glory are yours

Now and for ever. Amen.

Today's reading is from the book of 1 Peter, chapter 2, verses 18 to 25.

Reading - 1 Peter 2.18-25

¹⁸ Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

²² 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.'^[a]

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ 'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.'²⁵ For 'you were like sheep going astray,'^[b] but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

This is the word of the Lord – **thanks be to God**

Talk

The first word in today's passage is 'Slaves', the people Peter is addressing. Many Christians were slaves because about one person in three was a slave then, and the spiritual freedom they found with conversion translated into a desire for personal and political freedom. This created problems for the early churches. The message of Peter, and of Paul, is to submit to earthly hierarchy and trust in God for support and protection. We aren't slaves but we do suffer mistreatment.

How often do you feel mistreated, unfairly criticised or persecuted at work? I'm not asking whether you feel like that but how often because everyone experiences it. Some of us feel like this at work every day; you might lie awake at night, perhaps find your stomach in knots, or you might be afraid for others and the mistreatment they receive.

Peter writes about the importance of endurance. Verse 18 acknowledges that not all masters are bad. The kind of slaves he addresses here were house servants and some would have been well treated, owned so they could work as doctors, teachers or musicians, and perhaps paid to do so. But if they were mistreated, they had no legal rights at all, no recourse against their masters because they were not Roman citizens. We are better off than they were, but masters did not have to be mild, kind or fair – they might be bullying or unjust, just as they can now. So how should we react?

Verse 18 is clear – do as you are asked, even if unfairly treated. But, but, do so because you are conscious of God: v.19 'it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God'. In several other places in the Bible such as Romans 13 it states that those in authority, including poor specimens of humanity, are there for God's purpose, so we have to submit out of God-consciousness, not boss-consciousness. That means, not out of self-interest and especially not out of fear.

So be subject, do as you are asked, but never disobey God's commands in doing so, for example never lie. An example – have you heard of 'Gibbo' who shared an office with his boss Gordon Selfridge, owner of the world famous store Selfridges?

The phone rang and Gibbo answered. The caller wanted to speak to Gordon Selfridge. Gibbo asked the caller to hold on and told Gordon who was calling. Gordon said 'Tell him I'm not here'. Gibbo handed the phone to Gordon and said 'You tell him you're not here.' Gordon was furious but Gibbo said to his boss 'I refused because if I can lie FOR you I can lie TO you.' From that moment Gibbo was taken into the confidence of Gordon Selfridge and considered a trusted source.

That was an example of integrity, acting in line with the true master, God, and it's not easy to dare to follow our Christian consciences as strongly as Gibbo did, but it is the right thing for us.

If we are to suffer, make sure it is for what is right, make sure it's for unjust suffering, not for doing wrong. Verse 20 says there's no credit in enduring pain that you deserve. But Peter repeats the point again there that God wants us to patiently endure.

There are two kinds of endurance. We can endure because there are bills to pay so we have no choice but to carry on, thinking fearfully about those bills and providing for those in our homes, but there's also the kind of patient endurance described here, God-trusting, receiving praise and commendation: 'it is commendable' v 19, 'to your credit' v 20, again 'commendable before God' v 20. If you've been repeatedly bullied or harassed you'll know how you begin to doubt your own ability and wonder whether you are wrong and not your manager. Stick to what fulfils the demands of your conscience as a Christian, refuse to cross the ethical line, and those self-doubts will become no more than a faint whisper.

Knowing God is pleased when we patiently endure is a huge encouragement. There won't always be a fair outcome though here and now. Christians are persecuted and killed for their belief in some places, rather than the kind of harsh workplace experiences I've been thinking of, and they are called to endure and trust that God's justice will be done either in this life or the next.

Christ's example is the subject of the later verses, and verse 21, 'to this you were called' has the startling assertion that we have been called to unjust suffering. That doesn't mean that God is making you suffer but that he knows his children are bound to do so in the world as it is. So how should we handle it?

I used to work with an over-competitive, childish man who annoyed everyone. He made quite a few people suffer, I can tell you. One day when he'd deliberately done something to annoy me I prayed as I walked along before I met him and asked Jesus to help. He started by saying something prickly but I just smiled and made some friendly remark, and all his aggressive, defensive manner vanished – he really needed a friend, or at least a friendly moment. He was always better after that – and I didn't stop thanking Jesus and asking him to help again and again with that man. It was so much better than confrontation.

Christ set the example 'so that you should follow in his steps' – he broke a path through the undergrowth of suffering so that we can walk it more easily. The paradoxes of Christian

belief are here – Jesus was wounded that we might be healed, and he died that we might live.

What did he do? And what did he not do? Peter tells us what he didn't do because our first instinct is to retaliate or threaten. We learn to stick up for ourselves from an early age. Jesus did no wrong and he told no lies. He was innocent of the crimes for which he was executed. He was flogged brutally. He was blindfolded and punched by guards asking 'Who hit you?' He was silent. Who was in control in that situation? Not those who seem to be, in terms of worldly power. He was questioned and he did not defend himself. He was judged. What was his verdict on all those who abused him, even as he was dying on the cross? 'Father, forgive them'. Now he is the judge, an experienced and loving judge who can sympathise with our weaknesses.

Don't do wrong. Don't threaten. Don't return abuse. Exercise self-control. Be Christ-like. Entrust yourself to God as judge because he is just, but remember that may be the only justice you will get. If you want an image from our era, think of the Civil Rights movement in 1960s America with people being beaten and dragged around by violent racists in uniforms. They didn't fight back; they followed Martin Luther King, a Baptist minister who followed God's calling. He wasn't protesting so he could ride in the white section of the segregated bus – he knew he was laying down his life for others. And there are many great heroes who are unknown ordinary people inspired by God to improve the world.

Does that mean you shouldn't fight injustice; just be a silent, passive sufferer? Well yes, that is the example to follow when it is personal; don't retaliate to assert your self-worth. But do challenge injustice if you see people mistreated, if you see a colleague's career hurt, or a customer sold faulty goods to meet a target, merely for the vainglory of your boss.

The church is a proper place to challenge injustice. The anti-slavery movement began with a few devout evangelical believers in Clapham who eventually made that hugely profitable and evil trade illegal in Britain. The church is a proper place for social debate, and protest against injustice.

Jesus as an example is wonderful, but we need more than an example – we need a saviour. 'He bore our sins in his body' on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live the resurrection life.

Verses 24 and 25 tell us why we should endure and trust in Christ. His substitution for us on the cross was unjust – he faced judgment in our place. We have been given life – to act righteously – so let's do that and do so thankfully. His wounds were healing wounds; we are the healed. His pain, our gain. He is the good shepherd, who sought us out and brought us back to the fold. He goes ahead of us, showing the path for us to walk, laying down his life against bullying, persecuting, even murdering opposition so that we can face suffering without fear, without retaliating to assert our self-worth but living in the fullness that comes when we trust in the one who works everything for our good and for his glory.

Blessing

God, you are everything to us,
giving us life,
filling us with love,
and setting us free from sin

that we might live in you.
Accept the work of our hands this day,
take our lives,
give us your peace
and renew us in the service of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

I wish you a very good week.