

The Cross of Christ: Our Example

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome to another Sermon on the Web from St. John's Shaughnessy Anglican Church in Vancouver, Canada. You are free to use this mp3 audio file and to redistribute it to others without alteration and without charge. After the sermon, listen for information about St. John's Shaughnessy Church and the St. John's website. The following message is from the November 26, 2000 service at St. John's Shaughnessy. The Reverend David Short delivered his message from the book of 1 Peter, the second chapter, verses 1 to 25. The title of the message is

The Cross of Christ, Our Example. If you would open up your Bibles please at 1 Peter chapter 2 on page 217.

I want to confess that I have a long and very unhappy history with this morning's passage. My high school education was spent entirely within the confines of an Anglican church school in Sydney. It was one of the last remaining bastions of colonial empire distinction. Every day at my school I wore a tie and a suit and a straw boater on my head with school colours.

Chapel was compulsory as were scripture classes and at the start and the end of every term all the boys had to read this reading. And one of the punishments for a breach of discipline in the early years was you had to learn this school reading from the authorised version 1611 by heart.

[2 : 1 6] And if you begin me I can say it in my sleep. And I've always resented the passage because of verse 20 where we are told that if we are unfairly punished we ought to take it patiently.

And it was transparently apparent to me that the school founders chose the passage to keep us most servile and to cover their own injustices. And we were punished unjustly many times.

And I've managed to avoid this passage for the last 25 years. I've never preached on it. Whenever it's come round on the roster I've put someone else on.

Until this week. And as I've worked on the passage and God has worked on me and I've found it infinitely more frustrating than I imagined. However this I have learned that the key is not verse 20 but verse 21.

For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps.

[3 : 2 3] This is the last in a series of 12 sermons on the cross of Jesus Christ and I must say I feel just about ready to begin. We've seen how God prepared his world for the coming of his son by rescuing his people, redeeming them out of Egypt.

How he prepared us by giving his people a sacrificial system to teach the seriousness of sin and the cost of reconciliation. We've seen how Jesus himself understood his death as the key reason for his coming into the world and that his death he understood in terms of a great redemption from slavery to sin himself as the sacrifice.

We've seen how the New Testament apostles show us that the death of Jesus is the primary revelation of God's holiness and God's love where God did the great exchange where he gave our sins to Jesus so that Jesus would die and he gives us Jesus' righteousness so that we might live. And we have also seen that through faith in Jesus Christ we are crucified with him. We die with him and rise with him and now live with him. And as we come to this final passage this morning the Apostle Peter wants us to know that Jesus' death has an intensely practical impact in our lives.

To this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. Jesus' death is not just salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of sins.

[4 : 5 1] It is meant to be the shape and pattern of our lives. You know in his earthly ministry Jesus taught his disciples two things about suffering. The first one was it was God's will that he would suffer for our sins and the second one it's God's will that everyone who follows Jesus Christ will also suffer.

And Peter, the one who writes this book was scandalised by the talk that he regarded as nonsense. And he had to learn the lesson the hard way and now he teaches us this hard learned lesson that suffering is an essential part of the Christian life.

You see the way in which Jesus went to the cross shows us that there is something infinitely more important in our lives than comfort and abundance.

And that while suffering is an evil that we shouldn't create for ourselves or for anyone else it is not outside God's good will for us. Indeed it is in our suffering that God works his will and makes himself known to us in ways that he cannot when all is going swimmingly.

And it is here that Jesus' example is not to be just admired from a distance but to be lived out in the very difficult circumstances in which you find yourselves and I find myself.

[6 : 08] That is what Peter means by this word example in verse 21. It refers to a letter or a figure that you draw to teach children and the child copies it and traces it over and over and over until she can make the shape herself.

It is exactly what this word means. The apostle is saying that we need to lay the cross of Jesus over our lives and to trace it over and over and over again until our lives take the shape of the crucifixion. That is what it means to be Christian. And when we begin to do that we will feel completely alien in our culture. That is why he begins the passage back in verse 11 with these words.

He says, I beseech you beloved as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. To trace the pattern of Christ's life in our lives means we will not feel at home here in this world.

That every day we are reminded that our real citizenship is in heaven and that our central compass and our control in our decision making comes from there and not from here.

[7 : 21] And the one person in my life who makes this most difficult is me. That is what Peter means here. That the biggest difficulty in tracing the cross in my life and its pattern is not the world.

It is not the enemies. It is not even my suffering but it is the seething mass of passion and lust which wages a very well orchestrated campaign on my soul each day.

The very first thing that the cross of Jesus meets in my life when it comes into my life is not a deep inner resource of imagination and strength but a stubborn desire for my own self-gratification.

But you know the interest of the passage is not in my private inner struggle. It really is in the New Testament. The real interest to the apostle is how the footsteps of Jesus Christ provide a path for us to walk daily through life.

And as Alan read this passage for us I hope you could see that God expects the cross of Jesus to make a difference to us. That if we begin to follow Jesus it ought to turn us into better citizens, trustworthy employees, considerate neighbours, devoted husbands and wives, sympathetic and generous people committed to the good of the city and to others.

[8 : 34] Look at verse 12. Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. The fact is, Peter says, that your life and my life influences those around us.

And the reason we pattern our lives on the cross is not for our own self-preservation. It's not so that we will have happy, well-adjusted, spiritually fulfilled lives.

Ultimately the reason is so that those around us will come to see the Lord Jesus Christ and the glory of God. Peter urges us not to withdraw when we are misunderstood or things become difficult. God's desire is not that we are shaped by the culture but that we shape the culture round about us. We live as aliens and exiles. It is we who are to have the influence, not just on the moral tone.

We are to have a missionary influence. And in the passage Peter gives us two snapshots of what that looks like in action. The first, as Christian citizens and the second, as Christian workers.

[9 : 42] And I just want to look briefly at them with you this morning. In verses 13 to 17 he tells us what it means to be a Christian citizen. And I just remind you he's writing in the reign of Nero the emperor.

If you became a Christian during Nero's reign you were regarded as a criminal by many including the emperor. You know if you no longer went along Friday night and joined in the orgies of the local temple you were seen as a threat to the current structures that ensured the entire edifice of pagan happiness.

You know this was the primary accusation against the early Christians. They were enemies of the state. Suetonius, the Roman author writing in Nero's time calls Christianity a mischievous

superstition.

This is the official government line. Tacitus reports to Nero and calls Christianity hideous and shameful. Stockwell Day doesn't know how lucky he is.

Look at verse 13. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution whether it be to the emperor supreme governor sent by him to punish those who do wrong praise those who do right.

[10:54] For it's God's will that by doing right you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. The apostle is saying that the various social institutions which order our lives have been placed there by God.

That if you are a Christian you and I are to submit ourselves to these institutions and be good citizens. I read a disturbing statistic this week that churchgoers in North America that only 25% of churchgoers vote in elections.

I hope you all vote tomorrow. And in verse 14 Peter tells us that the role of the government in our country is to give expression to the righteousness of God to punish those who deserve it and to reward those who deserve it as well.

In other words the civil authorities are placed there by God not just to be concerned with our material well-being but with our moral well-being. But notice please the reason why we are to act as obedient citizens.

The apostle in the New Testament never idolizes civil authorities rather they do the opposite. We are to submit to the authorities not because they are the ultimate authority but because God is.

[12:08] You see in verse 13 we are to be subject for the Lord's sake. Verse 15 we influence others for it's God's will. In verse 16 we are to live as slaves of God.

We submit to human authorities not because of their inherent goodness or cleverness or appropriateness but out of obedience to God. And incidentally that means that we don't follow them blindly.

When civil or ecclesiastical authorities act contrary to the clear will of God it's our duty to resist them. Let me give you an illustration. Keep your finger in 1 Peter and turn back to Acts chapter 4 for a minute.

Page 115 This is an incident from the life of Peter who is writing this letter and he and John have been preaching about Jesus Christ in Jerusalem and they have been arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin and the Sanhedrin is the ecclesiastical and civic authority in Jerusalem and they are ordered not to proselytise and not to evangelise and we read in verse 18 that the Sanhedrin called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus but Peter and John answered them respectfully whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God you must judge for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard and when they had threatened them further they let them go finding no way to punish them because of the people for all men praise God for what had happened.

Let's go back to 1 Peter all of us inhabit civil structures some of us in this congregation even work in them and as Christian citizens we are meant to be known not as takers but as contributors and if you work in these structures it may feel like it's a very leaky ship but part of tracing the pattern of Jesus Christ into our lives is seeing that very leaky ship as the arena for God's activity and to seek to serve Christ and to love others out of fear of God.

[14:16] Again we are to work for the good of the city not for the city's sake alone but for the gospel's sake to muzzle those who love nothing better than abusing Christians.

We are to work and live in the steps of Jesus to make as much positive contribution as we can but the ultimate reason is not so that we will be the best we will be although that may happen nor is it to make a better society though that may happen as well but it's that others might come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice how Peter encapsulates all this in verse 17 with four quick commands. Honour all men he says love the brotherhood fear God honour the emperor.

How is it possible for us to honour all men to esteem every person highly? The answer is the cross. In the cross God loved those upon whom his wrath rested and we are to have God's attitude.

He treats all of us with deep and abiding respect and it was very costly for him to do so and we are to do the same. But if we are to honour all people we are to love the brotherhood.

[15:25] The brotherhood. We're not just to love a few individuals within the congregation who are not bothersome to us but our desire is meant to be for the welfare of the whole congregation as a distinct group.

You know that the biblical expectation if you are a Christian is that you are to give time to work for the good of your church. It is part of belonging to Christ that you have a desire and a commitment to work for the upbuilding of the congregation.

Let me just turn you to your prayer book for a second. I wonder if you would take out your wine coloured prayer book and turn to page 555. If you are a new Christian and trying to form your life after the gospel here are six helpful priorities.

If you've found this section it means you've been in some very boring sermons because it's near the bagger but it's a wonderful down the second half of this page every Christian man or woman should from time to time frame for himself a rule of life in accordance with the precepts of the gospel and the faith and order of the church wherein he may consider the following one the regularity of her attendance of public worship and especially at the Holy Communion two the practice of private prayer Bible reading and self-discipline three bringing the teaching example of Christ into her everyday life four the boldness of his spoken witness to his faith in Christ five his personal service to the church and the community and six the offering of money according to his means for the support of the work of the church at home and overseas now today is stewardship Sunday and stewardship in Anglican circles usually means money but as we move into Advent next week in the new

Christian year I want to invite you to think about your stewardship in terms of your time the management seminars are telling us now that time is the currency of the 21st century which simply means we're all way too busy to love the brotherhood will take an investment of time it takes time to get to know other people it takes time to make room in our lives for one another it cannot happen just through an hour or two on Sunday morning if you feel disconnected here at St. John's it's probably because you are if you do not see vulnerability around you it may be because you're not making yourself vulnerable if you're feeling unloved it may be that you need to love those around about you the New Testament view of Christian citizenship is that we work for the good of the city and we give ourselves in love for the church this is the example of Christ and the root of both is in the will of God and the fruit of both is the glory of God that's Christian citizenship let's turn quickly and briefly then to the

[18:24] Christian worker back in 1 Peter verse 18 servants be submissive or be subject to your masters with all respect not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing Peter turns to one of the most difficult work situations possible household servants the word is servant it's not slave but would have included a very great many slaves you know over 50% of all the people in the Roman Empire worked as servants you could be a free person or a slave Peter doesn't endorse the institution of slavery any more than he legitimizes the Roman Empire but he does recognize that the place of work can be a place of suffering and he honors slaves and he honors servants many of us feel the same way by reminding them that they have the opportunity to follow the example of the suffering servant in a unique way and I think what's so offensive to our modern ears is that Peter doesn't spend any time addressing the rights of slaves instead he goes straight for their

Christian responsibility and the reason is the New Testament again teaches there's something eternally more important than our rights and that is our likeness to the Lord Jesus and that our behavior is ultimately governed not by how we're treated but by the Lord that we follow and let me just pause and say that Peter of course is not speaking about those situations where we are able to take steps within those institutions to stop evil taking place if there's flagrant abuse where others are at risk personally sexually physically the New Testament urges us to act Peter here is speaking about the ordinary daily circumstances of difficulty in which we find ourselves tracing the pattern of Jesus life into ours happens in the real world and he says there's no difficulty to do that when you're treated with kindness and respect but what if you're treated unjustly or unkindly as a Christian what if you are in an impossible relationship where you seem powerless and hammered for doing good verse 19 one is approved if mindful of

God he endures pain while suffering unjustly you're great surprise if you don't every one of us have masters who are fitful and fickle and arbitrary and arrogant and the New Testament says there are two ways of dealing with them we either get revenge as soon as we can or we suffer patiently and this is what we found haven't we as we've looked at the cross in the New Testament there are two different moral systems and what separates them is not so much the different view of suffering what separates them is the cross for in the cross we learn that God worked his deepest good in deep pain that God is working not in spite of pain or beside our pain but in and through those pains and

that phrase in verse 19 enduring pain is literally meaning bearing up under a heavy burden of many griefs so that when we receive the griefs we are to receive them from the hand of God and not just run away from them how did

Jesus do that how did he face the cross in this way and suffer with patient endurance and I think the answer is in verse 23 when he was reviled he did not revile in return and when he suffered he did not threaten why he trusted to him who judges justly he didn't just take it with passive resignation he chose to actively deliver himself to hand himself over to God the God of power and love he acknowledged that above his difficulty and above his circumstances is a God who is sovereign and righteous and he left his vindication in the hands of God he entrusted himself to his heavenly father it's almost impossible for us to hear this this morning in a culture which worships youth and personal rights and pleasure I went to a bank I won't name it I went to a bank the other day and every brochure on the shelf started I want I want I want the idea that God works through suffering is often seen as a backup idea when medicine and self-help fails the truth is friends that you and I do not choose the suffering that comes to us its occurrence will always be guided by the mysterious providence of

God and we can choose to refuse it and to fight it frantically or to entrust ourselves to the God who judges justly and to allow him to take our pain and to make it an opportunity to fashion our hearts into the shape of the life of Jesus Christ for to this you were called since Christ suffered for you leaving you an example that you might follow in his steps I find it very difficult to come to the end of the series on the cross know what to say it's the heart and the core of what we believe if we want to grow deeper in our knowledge of God and of his love we shall always be coming back to the cross if we want to know what God is doing in our lives and in the world around us we must come back to the cross it is our hope it is our life it is our death it is our identity it is foolishness to those who are perishing it is the power of God to those who are being saved and it is the very power and pattern of God in our lives it is in the cross where we are taught how to suffer and how to love how to be better citizens and workers and how to know the

[23 : 58] God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and it must be the center of our worship and life together here at St. John's or we will cease to be a Christian church for in Christ's death our guilt and our sin is taken away and we are forgiven and made righteous and made children of eternity and it has impressed me as I have prepared these sermons that even the shape of the instrument of execution is instructive for as the arms reach wide they teach us that God is willing to embrace us all in his son but that the way that he has done it is that he has been pierced through to death for us and that is the shape of God's holy love and it will always be for eternity and that is meant to be the shape of our lives amen this mp3 sermon along with many others is available from the St.

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