

**5.07.23 – Easter 5**  
**“Following Christ’s Example”**  
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Psalm 73:1-14 (NIV)**

*A psalm of Asaph.*

- <sup>1</sup> Surely God is good to Israel,  
to those who are pure in heart.
- <sup>2</sup> But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;  
I had nearly lost my foothold.
- <sup>3</sup> For I envied the arrogant  
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- <sup>4</sup> They have no struggles;  
their bodies are healthy and strong.
- <sup>5</sup> They are free from common human burdens;  
they are not plagued by human ills.
- <sup>6</sup> Therefore pride is their necklace;  
they clothe themselves with violence.
- <sup>7</sup> From their callous hearts comes iniquity;  
their evil imaginations have no limits.
- <sup>8</sup> They scoff, and speak with malice;  
with arrogance they threaten oppression.
- <sup>9</sup> Their mouths lay claim to heaven,  
and their tongues take possession of the earth.
- <sup>10</sup> Therefore their people turn to them  
and drink up waters in abundance.
- <sup>11</sup> They say, “How would God know?  
Does the Most High know anything?”
- <sup>12</sup> This is what the wicked are like—  
always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.
- <sup>13</sup> Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure  
and have washed my hands in innocence.
- <sup>14</sup> All day long I have been afflicted,  
and every morning brings new punishments.

**Leader: This is Poetry of Confession.** All: Thanks be to God!

**1 Peter 2:11-25 (NLT)**

<sup>11</sup> Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. <sup>12</sup> Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.

*Respecting People in Authority*

<sup>13</sup> For the Lord's sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state, <sup>14</sup> or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right.

<sup>15</sup> It is God's will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. <sup>16</sup> For you are free, yet you are God's slaves, so don't use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. <sup>17</sup> Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king.

*Slaves*

<sup>18</sup> You who are slaves must submit to your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel. <sup>19</sup> For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment. <sup>20</sup> Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you.

<sup>21</sup> For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.

<sup>22</sup> He never sinned,  
nor ever deceived anyone.

<sup>23</sup> He did not retaliate when he was insulted,  
nor threaten revenge when he suffered.

He left his case in the hands of God,  
who always judges fairly.

<sup>24</sup> He personally carried our sins  
in his body on the cross  
so that we can be dead to sin  
and live for what is right.

By his wounds  
you are healed.

<sup>25</sup> Once you were like sheep  
who wandered away.

But now you have turned to your Shepherd,  
the Guardian of your souls.

**Leader: These Words of Instruction are of God! All: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

Dear Lord, we come to you after several weeks of joyful praise at your resurrection and celebrating our church's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. This week, however, we hear of violent suffering and shootings, tragic losses, and ongoing wars. Our readings remind us to praise you every day whether we feel joy or not. Help us to cope and accept suffering for your sake and guide us how to testify to others of your goodness and presence, not your absence. Be present to us now as we study these sobering Scriptures. Comfort us enough to do your work and comfort others in despair over

circumstances. May your voice be the one heard today as you speak through mine. Amen.

---

Well, didn't we have fun last week?! Thank you to all who helped make our anniversary celebration a success. It took each of you to prepare, participate, and clean up after the event. I certainly enjoyed the food, fellowship, photos, and especially the stories! Let's continue to share memories throughout this year, so I can capture a few more for a history summary.

Yes, it has been a week of tragedy on the world stage, yet also the British coronation, an inspiring Kentucky Derby upset, a refreshing Virginia Baptist Women in Ministry conference on Friday, family vacations, concerts, and lots of good stuff happening in people's lives. As Christians we have a choice in our focus day to day, and I think that is what today's passages challenge us to make. What will our attitude be today and tomorrow? Can we share the overwhelming love and grace of Jesus Christ with others? Will that influence their focus, perhaps? Will we be doomsayers about end times, or will we be encouragers and guides to those who do not yet know his love? However we go through our daily lives reflects on Jesus, so will it be with positivity, love, and mercy or with despair, wringing hands, and fear? Both the psalmist and Peter instruct us to reflect love, trust, and obedience.

Psalm 73 was written by one of David's musicians, Asaph, who struggled with sinful thoughts and how he could stay accountable to God with so much temptation around him. He was envious of the wicked's prosperity, yet they denied God. He observed that wicked people did well by using evil devices to cover their sin. Their undeserved lifestyles were

flagrant and luxurious, while his life, though devoted to God, was in disarray because of suffering and difficult circumstances. God seemed to prosper the wicked and punish the righteous! The unbelievers got fat and entertained themselves into happiness, while the writer lived sacrificially, loving God, and yet suffered many indignities. This reminded me of Job and Isaiah 53. The psalmist tries hard to keep a clean heart, but needs God's help to do so, as do we. Lent and Easter were opportunities to reevaluate our own lives, admit sin, ask for forgiveness, and receive redemption. We were reminded that part of our faith journey is to accept moments of suffering as Christ did, but to know that despair is not the final destination. Our reward is freedom because of Christ.

In our second reading, Peter reminds his audience that the world rejects their values and ideas, so the new believers ought to live separately from the world. They should abstain from physical lusts and sins that were popular at the time. Doesn't that sound like today? Christians are to be examples of Christ's love and grace: resisting the attraction of sin, doing charitable deeds, and obeying the civil and moral laws. A good life like this helps others to see and be drawn toward the mercy God gives us in salvation. Remember, Christians were being rounded up for persecution even if falsely accused, and Peter was trying to prepare them. A believer's best response would be good behavior.

He also speaks to servanthood. He meant being a slave to God, not man: honoring God's values of love, trust, honor, beauty, accountability, and integrity. Christians are to be in awe of God, submitting to **his** authority, following Christ's example, bearing unjust suffering, if necessary, as a testimony of God's grace. We must be cautious, however,

**not** to use this passage to justify the abusive behaviors of others; many prominent American so-called Christians did justify their own slaveholdings in our country's early history. In the early 1960's, Martin Luther King, Jr. called for a loving, forgiving, nonviolent resistance to the unjust suffering from systemic biases and prejudices of his day.

Peter called these Christians to be loyal citizens through patient submission to the Roman governing forces with no retaliation or justification, to "honor the emperor," even though Peter himself was not always compliant. This speech called them to be loyal citizens of the kingdom of God as well. We are called to follow Christ to the cross if necessary, knowing that we will be with him in paradise. In this slave-master relationship Peter writes about, you may have to redefine what slavery is for you. It might be more subtle: perhaps economic slavery, or dealing with physical limitations, a difficult boss or manager, or agism, racism, or gender bias issues. Peter's words still apply. Jesus chose the life of a servant, washing the feet of his friends, reviled by most yet faithful to the end, taking our sins on to give us freedom. That freedom calls us to love each other, reconcile where possible, and take nonviolent action when necessary. Can we follow Christ's example? Last week we learned about holy living; this week is more practical. We are so fortunate that even difficulties here are easier than in other lands. Hear now a quote from the early 1500's by theologian Martin Luther: "Our suffering is not worthy the name of suffering. When I consider my crosses, tribulations, and temptations, I shame myself almost to death, thinking what are they in comparison of the sufferings of my blessed Savior Christ Jesus." How then shall we live? Amen! |/

**Will you pray with me?** Redeeming Christ, we thank you for this message to remind us we are loved and saved. Help us to make the right choices in how we live each day and how we illuminate your grace for others to see. Lord, we ask your help to live accountable lives in community as you did with the disciples. As we share the Lord's Supper, let us recall your sacrifice for our freedom. Make us worthy to receive.  
**Amen.**