

Suffering and Security

- 1 Peter 5:10-14
- Peter has come to the end of his letter to the scattered churches filled with elect exiles, and he seems to have come full circle. He started with an exclamation of praise to God who has caused us to be born again through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, and that is being kept for us in heaven by the same power of God that is guarding us through faith for salvation. And we rejoice in that even when we are grieved by various trials, because they will result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ returns. Now Peter returns to those same themes, reminding us that we are not alone in our suffering, as all the brotherhood are going through the same things for the same purpose: eternal glory in Christ. Faith does not remove us from what is painful or sad or tragic. Life in a fallen world is hard. If Peter has taught us anything in this letter, it is that our suffering in Christ is purposeful because of God's providence. It has purpose, and our security in Christ takes us through many dangers, toils, and snares. Suffering does not shake our security, it strengthens it. It does not remove our faith, it proves it. The Puritans used to say, "Trials come to prove and to reprove us." Suffering is part of the promise of sanctification of the elect, as Paul said in Romans 8: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." And I know that as a congregation of believers who are being conformed to the image of Christ, we are all going through difficulties of varying types and degrees. A simple study of the Bible relieves us of any nonsense that we are supposed to be living our best life now. Or that if we are going through something hard that must be proof that God either doesn't love us or that he doesn't even exist. No! We can say with James, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds." God uses trials in our lives to make us look like Jesus. JM Barrie, the Scottish playwright, was the ninth child of ten and two of his older brothers died before he was born. When he was 6 his 14 year-old brother died in an accident. Barrie said of these losses, "That is where my mother got her soft eyes. And that is why other mothers ran to her when they had lost a child." Our suffering has purpose in God's providence.
- Let's learn from this passage today by looking at the last section first. Our two main points will be final greetings and grace and glory.
- **Final greetings (verses 12-14)**
- Peter, like his fellow apostle Paul, knows that he does not serve God on an island. He mentions two faithful brothers in his final greetings. First is Silvanus, "a faithful brother" to Peter, who most likely is the messenger; the one who carried but did not help write, the letter. We also know this man as Silas, who was sent along with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to encourage the work among the Gentiles there, and Silas is referred to as a prophet who "encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words." (Acts 15:32). Silas would later accompany Paul on his second missionary journey. He is evidently a close companion to Peter, considered to be one who was faithful and trustworthy to not only deliver the letter to the churches but also, in Peter's absence, interpret any parts of it that were confusing to the readers. We all in some way serve as Silas did by taking the message of the Word to others so they can hear it and so that we can help them understand it.
- The second faithful brother Peter mentions is Mark. We know him first in Acts 12 where after Peter was released by an angel from prison he headed to where he knew the church would be meeting: in the home of Mary, whose son was John but also called Mark. John Mark would accompany Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, only to quit after a short time. Barnabas and Paul later split over whether Mark should go on the second journey, since he had bailed on the first one. So Barnabas took Mark with him and Paul took Silas, and the missionary effort was doubled, and Mark was given a chance to be restored. In 2 Timothy we see that Mark was also restored in Paul's eyes as well, as he writes to Timothy, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for

ministry.” And John Mark is very useful to all who believe, as he wrote the second Gospel. Our trials are meant to prove us and reprove us!

- Peter ends the letter with something that we can all practice during the greeting time, telling the churches to “Greet one another with the kiss of love.” Paul said the same to the Roman church, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” If Ann Newman is here this morning, she can teach you how to do this. It is believed that this was a part of the service in first century churches, striking fear and panic into the hearts of introverts and probably extroverts as well. But it was a kiss on the cheek that demonstrated full acceptance and love for each person, a friendly gesture meant to battle against even the appearance of cliques or divisions in the body of Christ. That leads us to...
- **Grace and glory (verses 10-11)**
- As I said, Peter brings the letter full circle and reminds the elect exiles once again that their suffering is purposeful but temporary. “After you have suffered a little while,” he writes. Some of you might feel like your suffering has gone on for much more than a little while, and indeed there are people who suffer most or all of their lives with chronic illness. But the Bible tells us we are not victims of chance. We are not tossed about by the wind and waves of fate or cruel destiny. Instead, the promise is this, that the God of all grace is for us, and he has called us to his eternal glory in Christ. And even though our suffering may last a lifetime, it is a ‘little while’ compared to the eternal glory we have waiting for us, kept in heaven for you and for me. In light of eternity, all suffering is for a little while. As the Puritans liked to say, “Affliction may be lasting, but it is not everlasting.”
- Peter then tells us four things God is doing for us now and will bring to completion then, on that day when we see Jesus face to face. When we see him, John wrote, we will be like him.
- First, he will restore us. It is the word used for restoring a broken bone, putting it back in place. Or the restoration of a ship brought into dry dock so that it can be repaired for use again. Hebrew 13:21 uses the same word when the writer says that God will “equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight.” That restoration work, that equipping may sometimes be painful, like a leg that has been broken and is put back into place. Those of you who have been through rehab from a physical therapist knows that their main job is to hurt you in order to help you. The process is painful but purposeful, just as our suffering and even sometimes our restoration can be.
- Second, he will confirm us. The word means to establish, strengthen, or to set fast or permanent, so you won’t topple or be knocked over. I remember years ago when Cindy and I were in our first home, and putting up our first Christmas tree, which I had cut down in the field behind us, some scraggly pine that was barely a notch better than Charlie Brown’s. I had a stand that I put the tree in but it wasn’t a good stand and the tree was wobbly. So I ran outside in the dark to where I knew there were a couple of cinderblocks and I grabbed one, without gloves, and carried it toward the house. As I got to the back stoop, and into the light, I looked down and saw, right next to my thumb, the biggest healthiest black widow I had ever seen. I screamed and dropped the cinderblock, probably on my foot, I don’t remember. But God doesn’t use cinderblocks or spiders to help us stand firm and not be wobbly in our faith. And by the way, if you’re going to get a cinderblock in the dark, use a flashlight. Or at least gloves. But God strengthens us by the means of grace: his Word, prayer, the church, fellowship with our brothers and sisters. Paul wrote in his final words to the Romans, “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...” The promise that God will make us stand up straight in faith is a great comfort to all of us who know we are weak. I know I need God’s strength every day.
- Third, he will strengthen us. God not only keeps us from toppling but gives us strength to accomplish his purpose. He makes us strong in our soul and more and more as we walk with him. Outwardly we are wasting away but inwardly we are being renewed day by day. It would be a good practice for all of us, but perhaps especially those who are, shall we say, seasoned saints, to read Isaiah 40 every week. We may be feeling weakly because of age so we need to read this weekly. “Have you not known? Have

you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:28-31) I believe we who are older or more mature, regardless of age, have been given strength by God to encourage and teach and strengthen someone younger to come along behind and pick up where you leave off. It is our gift to the future of Antioch to do so!

- Fourth, he will establish us. This means he will place us on a firm foundation. Make us steadfast. And he has done that! Some of you have seen Hoover Dam on the border between Arizona and Nevada. Imagine a four-foot-wide sidewalk wrapped completely around the Earth at the equator. That’s how much concrete it took to build the Hoover Dam. The dam is 726 feet tall and 1,244 feet long, nearly a quarter of a mile. At its base, the dam is 660 feet thick. That type of foundation is necessary because at the base of the dam the water pressure is 45,000 lbs per square foot. God has promised to establish us on a foundation that makes the Hoover Dam look like something your kids make out of jello. He does that in us so when we face trials and we go through suffering for a little while, we don’t fall over. We don’t give in. Our hearts may waver and our strength may be small for a time, as Peter knew better than anyone. But God promises to restore and confirm and strengthen and establish us in him. I think of John the Baptist in prison and his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth talking about whether he would be ok and stand strong through this trial. And saying to one another, “I think we put him on the right path as a little boy growing up in this house. We taught him about God and how to trust in God even in times when he can’t see his plan. I think he will be ok.” And he was. God kept him strong, even through momentary doubts, as he does us as well. All the way to the end.
- God will restore and confirm and strengthen and establish us. God will do it. After he writes this, Peter goes right into worship. “To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”
- **To him. Dominion. Forever.**
- Prayer
- Greet One Another