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Stone Church of the Brethren
Sermon
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1 Peter 3
Be Prepared

Always Be Prepared...

I was never a boy scout. But I heard the old mantra - "Be prepared." Always be prepared. I remember hearing it at my friend's church in high school. They said we needed to be prepared. "Always be prepared - to tell people - to *convince people* - why they should believe in Jesus." The well meaning teacher was drawing that from this passage. The lesson was accompanied by various strategies for convincing other people and supposed "proofs" that grew less and less convincing over time...

It wasn't until several years later - while I was in college that I read that verse again - and read the verses around it for myself...

To the Scriptures...

At first, I'll admit, the apostle Peter seems to have a naive view of the world. "Be kind. Be honest. Seek peace. Who is going to harm you if you're eager to do good?" Well... History is full of good people who have suffered.

It gets even worse if you read the chapter before.

In chapter 2, he tells his readers to submit to Caesar. He tells Christian slaves to submit to their masters. And wives to their husbands. This is in the time of the Roman Empire and he's quoting these Roman "Household Codes" - or more properly titled, perhaps, Roman "Submission Codes" that laid out clear hierarchies within the Empire: Men over Women, Masters over Slaves, and the Emperor over all...

These passages have been used - mis-used - to justify abuse and to push faithful Christians into passive suffering. That is not what Peter had in mind at all...

Response to Suffering...

Peter's writing this letter from Rome - decades after Jesus' death and resurrection. He's writing to believers throughout the area who are being persecuted - Christ followers imprisoned and killed for their faith. As the story goes, Peter himself will be crucified by the Empire...

"Who is going to harm you if you're eager to do good?"

Peter is not naive. He is not oblivious to suffering. He's responding to it. This isn't an

affirmation of the submission codes - it's a framework for resistance in the midst of the suffering they create.

Peter is using the example of Christ whose own response to suffering transformed the world. Martin Luther King preached on 1 Peter - as did the early Anabaptists. They found in it a pattern for non-violent resistance that disrupts the cycles of violence power.

Small and Local

I was struck by a conversation I had yesterday - here at our church retreat. I was talking with one of you, and she said, "I've been trying to be kind lately. Everywhere I go. Just little things. At the grocery store - if I see an older person, I'll offer to help them to their car - or to put away their cart for them. My mom's been sick," she said, "and I can't help her - I can't help my mom, but maybe I can help somebody else." What a beautiful subversive act...

These little acts of kindness - toward strangers - in a world that teaches us to be suspicious and to look out for ourselves... Maybe this is part of the beginning of the transformation...

Because that's the goal. Sometimes we talk of creating safe spaces - that we imagine as fortresses that keep out and cut off those on the outside. But Peter is pushing us to risk vulnerability.

Instead of silo-ing ourselves off into warring camps, he's inviting us to the basin and the towel - to Jesus' way of interrupting the cycles of violence and hatred and evil.

He acknowledges that we might yet suffer - but says, "Suffering may be unavoidable - but if you're going to suffer - it's better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."

And then he reminds them of the story - he says that they were baptized into life with Jesus - he reminds them that Jesus suffered too. This isn't a passive resignation to suffering - it's an active, counter-cultural embrace of subversive hope...

The kind of hope that doesn't give up on them. Whoever the villains are on your daily news drama... Don't give up on them. Resist the despair that says they will never change. This is not the hope of Empire - that sees change through political victory or personal conquest... This is the hope of the basin and the towel, the way of the cross - that never gives up... Always believing in the possibility of redemption, in the hope of transformation...

It starts out small and local. That's what Russell Moore said in a recent interview. He was a leader in the conservative evangelical movement in America until a few years ago when he pushed back on growing trends of Christian nationalism - and they kicked him out...

"I don't think we fix it by fighting a war for the soul of evangelicalism," he said. "I really don't think we can fix it at the movement level... When I'm talking to Christians who are concerned

about this, my counsel is always "small and local." ...We have to do something different... [We have to] show a different way."

Then Tell the Story

So, live differently.

"Love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called...

And when they ask... If your life looks different... And others ask you why...
Be prepared to tell them...

Because that's what Peter is saying. He's not telling them to go out "Bible thumping" unsuspecting strangers on a street corner - convincing them of your dogmas of faith... No... Peter's saying that when you live like this - when you live *like Jesus did* - people are going to be confused. Nobody does that... People are going to be confused. They're going to ask... "What's wrong with you?" So be prepared to tell them...

When they ask why you don't join in "venting" about those people who vote differently than you do - or about your co-workers who frustrate you... When they ask why you speak about others with compassion and respect - even those who don't show the same courtesy in return... Tell them. Tell the story.

When they ask why you aren't as enamored of material things - investing precious time in real relationships instead of chasing after the almighty dollar - when they ask... Tell them...

When they ask where you find the courage to carry on - to bravely do what's right, even when you are afraid. When they ask where you find the courage to resist evil with love - even when it costs everything - then tell them! Tell them the story.

When they ask you find your hope - in a world where the news is filled with stories of disaster and violence... Tell them the story.

Tell them about a God of love who prayed forgiveness on his enemies - even as they nailed him to the cross.

Tell them the story of resurrection that proclaims life into a world where everyone dies.

Tell them you're part of the story - part of the hope of redemption, seeking not to judge the world, but to transform it...

Amen.