

## Sermon for Easter 7A – 1 Peter 5:6-11

### How to face suffering

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In these verses we are looking at today (5:6-11) Peter is actually talking, as you will see if you go back and read verses 1-5, first and foremost, to his fellow pastors of the church and teaching them about how to receive and cope with suffering in their lives, as they pastor their congregations. However, what he says here, in his advice to pastors, certainly applies to us all.

Let me just say though: today, I am particularly aware that I am preaching not just to you, the flock, but to myself, the shepherd called to pastor you. I am in the pulpit with Christ, but I am also in the pew with you. We are *together* listening to *the head shepherd* of the sheep, Jesus the Good Shepherd, as he guides and looks after us all in times of struggle and suffering.

And there is wonderful teaching for us to listen to here – four wonderful points in fact.

1. Humble yourself and God will lift you up.
2. Give your worries to God
3. Be sober-minded and watchful
4. Trust God to repair the damage

They are actually quite simple, and nothing new really, but they are very wise, and we will benefit from being reminded of them.

No 1: Humble yourself and God will lift you up

verse 6. ***Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that he may lift you up in due time.***

Life sometimes deals us an unfair hand. We may be badly treated, and we have the feeling that what has happened is just not right. Somebody has acted wrongly toward you, hurt you, damaged you, denigrated you, humiliated you; perhaps they have been careless or maybe sometimes they have been malicious – that's entirely possible. Our instinct in such situations is to mount our own defence and protect our own dignity. Why should we get walked over? Peter says: No, humble yourself under *God's mighty hand*. Because it is God who is in charge. He knows all; he knows who did what to whom and why and how. He knows your hurt, and your heart as well as others' hearts. He knows how we have not only been sinned against but how we all have sinned ourselves. When we look to him instead of ourselves, we can say 'Okay Lord, I

don't know what the heck is going on here, but I am not finally at anybody else's mercy but yours'. We humble ourselves under *his* mighty hand, even if we feel others have had a hand in it as well. God is God, and he loves you. Whatever you have suffered he will turn to your good. He will bring you out of it all, stronger and more mature. Just wait. He will lift you up again, in his due time.

No 2. Give your worries to God.

Verse 7: ***Cast all your anxieties on God for he cares for you.***

'It's no good complaining – nobody listens' Ever heard that saying. While it is usually meant to be humorous, there is more than a grain of truth in it. With the best will in the world, people get tired of listening to our troubles, even people who love us. It is very hard, because we human beings, in our fallen state, are not easily able to bear others' burdens; we are too busy looking for somebody to bear ours.

But *somebody* is able bear all our burdens: the one who cares for us, our all-loving, ever-listening God. He *wants to know* what we are struggling with, *wants to hear us* talk about it, he wants to support us, and he wants to listen to us.

Have you ever heard of the expression 'dumping on' somebody – unloading all your worries and problems onto somebody whether they want them or not, like a dump truck tipping its load of rubbish over them.

I thought of this immediately when I was studying the Greek text, because this is exactly to picture 'Cast your anxieties onto God' the verb here means exactly that: pick 'em up and throw them onto God, plonk. Dump on him. Because He cares. He has not only a mighty hand, but mighty shoulders. His ears are open. His heart is open to *you and me*.

No.3 Be sober-minded and watchful

Verse 8: ***Be sober-minded and watchful. Like a roaring lion, your adversary the devil, prowls around, looking for some one to devour.***

The one who is always looking for an opening in our lives, especially when we are in the middle of personal difficulties or problems is the devil. That adversary – the image of the lion is used in the Bible often to represent evil and the evil one because lions are absolutely fierce and ruthless hunters. Lions don't stop and interview you to see if you have medical insurance before they tear you apart. Neither does the devil.

He is on the prowl. And we need to be watchful and sober-minded - sensible, realistic and aware, not naïve and foolish. This is real. The devil has all kinds of tricks. He not only tries to lead God's people into sin, but tries to accuse us and shame us with sins that God has already forgiven. Don't fall for that one.

As Luther wisely observed, the devil also often wants to lead us into self pity. *He wants to convince us that we are the most woeful and unfortunate people in the world, victims of greater injustice and misfortune than anybody else. If we believe this story, says Luther, then the lion has swallowed us in one gulp. Indeed we suffer nothing that is not common to all people, pains which God our Father, in his Son, made right once and for all through his cross and suffering.*

That is so right – when things are tough for us, we need to turn and look at Christ and his suffering and death for us, as God's word teaches clearly. This is the best way for us to resist the devil – not to look at ourselves all the time as devil wants us to, but to look at Jesus. This is your 'belt of truth' and your 'sword of the Spirit', as Paul says in Ephesians 6. Peter is in fact using the same picture here: the alert and watchful sentry who is standing at the gate ready to act, through speaking God's word and praying. This, I cannot but note, has special significance for us pastors. It is the job of shepherds to watch over the sheep and guard them, even as it is the job of all Christians to keep watch over their own hearts.

No 4. Trust God to repair the damage

Verse 10: ***And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen and establish you.***

It is often the case that people who are going through something hard in life lose their sense of the future, and feel that they will never be able to recover. Grief, unemployment, marriage break-down, abuse and many other life-struggles can be like this.

But there *is* healing and hope, as Peter says, Jesus Christ has not just dumped you here in this world to deal with it all yourself, but has *called you to His eternal glory*. He will never leave us behind as collateral damage. He repairs our damage, in ways that we may never even think of ourselves, and in ways we may think are even possible, to prepare us for that eternal glory we will share with him.

Peter uses four very powerful verbs here to describe Christ's repair work in our lives. They are hard to translate well into English. They all come from the

medical world, specifically from military medical setting, describing the rehabilitation of wounded soldiers. He says God will mend us (literally set our broken bones), build us up (convalesces us), strengthen and rehabilitates us – getting us ready again for service in his kingdom, bringing us to being able-bodied and able able-souled.

God can do this, and he does. Whether you realise it or not *you* are living proof of that: think for a moment about how God has already in your life mended your damage and stood you up again on your own hind legs and gotten you moving again: serious illness, a personal or professional crisis. I have seen that happen to pastors as well as lay people. Wounded soldiers rehabilitated.

You may not be exactly the same person. God grows us, deepens us through tough times. There may be scars too, but like Christ's own scars, 'glorious scars' as the hymn writer, Charles Wesley called them. They become part of us as his 'cross and resurrection people', who have been brought through trials and are destined for glory.

Our risen and reigning Lord Jesus Christ is at work in our lives, even and especially in times that we find tough and challenging. Let me finish with the closing verse of our text, verse 11: to him be the power forever and ever.

**Amen.**