

# "Connected"

Text: 1 Peter 2:19-25

May the love of God the Father fill you with wonder; may the sacrifice of God the Son fill you with thanksgiving; and may the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit fill you with comfort, faith, and hope. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: You've no doubt heard the expression: "*Nature abhors a vacuum.*" That means, for example, that something will always take advantage of an opportunity. The biggest, toughest animals always occupy the best habitat. If that animal is removed, the next in line will move in.

Both expected and unexpected consequences occur when a vacuum is created. When, for example, human beings remove God from their lives, when they are no longer connected to him, you can fully expect the devil to move in. We can then also expect moral depravity, foolishness of every sort (because only "***a fool that says in his heart, 'There is no God.'***") and, in the end, an eternity in hell. Yet just as there are things that we would expect, there are many more of which we become conscious only after they have reared their ugly heads and worked their destruction. Just as "***the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,***" so also driving God from our society and our lives will invariably result in an incredible variety of bad things. God is supposed to be the rudder that gives direction to everything that we do. "***Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.***" Remove God from that passage and something else will fill that void. Having removed God, our society substitutes whatever it feels like. "*Do all to the glory of... mother earth, your country, your family, your pet, your job, your hobby, humanity.*" Pick your own noun. Pretty much anything has a shot at the title once God is removed.

In fact the consequences of removing God from our lives are endless. When God is removed as creator, man is free to pretend that he created himself. As soon as there is no longer a God that determines what is right and what is wrong, man immediately enters the free fire zone where society decides such things. If God didn't give life, we're free to decide who lives and who dies. You can see the results, by the way, in that today mass murderers have more rights than unborn children. If it wasn't God that created and defined marriage, then we are free to "marry" whomever (or *whatever*) we choose. Not long ago I read of a woman who married herself, the person she realized she loved the most, in a service complete with lavish ceremony, bridesmaids, and a reception. In short, there are

absolutely no limits to the stupidity and evil that man can justify once he disconnects himself from his God.

Our text for this morning, like all parts of God's Word, provides perfect guidance precisely because it not only originates from God himself, it rightly acknowledges the existence of God, the fact that he is the center of our existence, and our need to remain firmly connected to him. Our text is found in the First Epistle of Peter, the Second Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Peter 2:19-25** *For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. <sup>20</sup> For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. <sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. <sup>23</sup> When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

So far the Word of our God. What a joy and a privilege to possess these words of timeless truth as our sure and constant guide. That our God would bless our study of these perfect words, so we pray, "***Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.***" Amen.

The devil, as you know, is nothing if not clever. That means that while the devil is neither omnipotent nor omniscient (he isn't all-powerful and doesn't know all things) he learns from his mistakes and remembers what works. Not just in general; he knows what works best on you. He is at war against all that God loves, and he has absolutely nothing better to do with the time that is left to him than to seek to destroy whatever God cherishes – which is you.

Here's an example of how the devil operates within the confines of Christianity. Almost as soon as Jesus warned his followers that they would have hardship on earth if they followed in his footsteps, Satan promptly began twisting that truth to bring about truly ghastly atrocities. In other words, heinous actions were carried out by so-called Christians in the name of their religion. This sort of thing probably

reached its low-point during the days of the Crusades and the Inquisition. When those who carried out their wickedness were condemned by their Christian peers, or by society in general, they actually regarded all such criticism as *validation* that they were doing God's will. They were, after all, suffering for their actions, and in this they took great comfort. They undoubtedly wore their "persecution" as a badge of honor and trotted it out as evidence that they were "*doing God's will.*" No one ever said evil was necessarily smart or reasonable.

God the Holy Spirit countered all such nonsense with inspired words like our text for this morning. Here he clearly drew the line between barbaric acts of passion and true Godly service when he taught us, "***For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.***" What does that mean in practical terms? It means simply that suffering is absolutely no indication of whether one is acting rightly or wrongly. The key, again, is following the will of our God, who will never lead us into sin. Yet the opposite is also therefore true: remove God from your life and you have no hope but to wander into foolishness, sin, and unbelief. It would be like removing the steering wheel from your car and imagining that you will still get where you want to go, or that the devil can be trusted to program your navigation system.

Examples fill our world. I'm sure most if not all of you have seen obnoxious Christians who invite scorn and ridicule – not because of their message but because of their combative belligerence and obnoxious behavior. They succeed only in making Christianity look nutty and repulsive. You know there is something wrong when even devout Christians are embarrassed by their conduct and feel the need to distance themselves. Now, if God had somewhere in his Word told us to do things like that, we would gladly do so – trusting God to know what he's doing. It was for good reason that God gave no such command in his Word.

Yet I have no doubt that any hardship or persecution those Christians experience is also worn as a badge of honor and regarded as evidence that they are doing what God told them to do. There is a big difference between suffering for walking in harmony with God's will and actively seeking out persecution.

Remember, the great Christian Commission or goal is not to correct social ills and injustices but to save souls. True reform never precedes conversion. It does, however, follow naturally after an unbeliever is called to faith.

There are many other much more subtle examples all around us – and often *in our own lives*. Christian churches are now condoning and even promoting sinful lifestyles of every imaginable sort. This is just another symptom of no longer being connected to our God, or "***mindful of God***" as our text put it. If God isn't allowed to determine right and wrong, man will try to do it for him. What we are seeing is that those who are living in open sin and rebellion against God's Word nevertheless believe that they are the ones being persecuted – *by other Christians*.

Again, the Holy Spirit through Peter addressed this nonsense in our text when he said, "***For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?***"

The relation all of this has to our sermon theme (*Connected*) ought to be obvious. "***Mindful of God***" means always being *connected* to him. It means always considering every thought, word and action according to how God views it, and according to his will for our lives.

The fact of life for a Child of God in a sinful world is that we don't have to seek out persecution. Humbly and devoutly follow God's will in every aspect of your life *and persecution will find you*. Gently try to recall someone from the sin that has taken ownership of them and you will suffer. Patiently try to share sin and grace with an unbeliever and many will ridicule you for it. Humbly refuse to pretend that all religions are the same and most will despise you for it. The difference is that you are suffering for doing *what God has actually told you to do*.

We began by talking about the unforeseen consequences of disconnecting from our God, of failing to consider God and his will in everything we do. Every individual life presents countless examples: choice of spouse, career selection, raising children, how husbands and wives treat each other, how we act when no one is looking. When human beings are "mindful of God," bonded or connected to him, they acknowledge that life is not about us; it is about him. Man also then accepts the fact that since it is God who created us, every gift or ability he has given us is intended by God to be used to its fullest in his service – directly or indirectly. Being connected to our God means following the example of Jesus, even if it involves hardship.

But can our calling in this life really be to suffer, like Jesus did? Is that really why we were called into the Christian faith and what our God wants for our lives? Is that really what our text is saying? Yes and no.

Does our God want us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus? Our text certainly seems to say just that: "**Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.**" Yet we have to define and qualify our terms here, since the devil loves to distort and pervert even the simplest Bible truths. In this case, Satan has successfully misrepresented these words to indicate that Jesus didn't actually win our salvation and forgiveness for our sins. He "**left us an example**" of how we must earn our own passage. According to Satan, it is only when we do as Jesus did that we can have any confidence that God the Father loves us and will accept us into his heaven. In other words, Jesus didn't do it for us; he showed us how to do it for ourselves.

Disturbingly enough, this sort of nonsense is very appealing to all flesh – maybe because it gives the illusion that we too, like Jesus, can earn our own way into heaven through our suffering here on earth. Man's pride and man's ego are fertile soil for the devil's seeds. He plants that sort of nonsense in our minds, and it tends to flourish in that sort of organic compost.

Our text clarifies and corrects this spiritual nonsense. It leaves no vacuum, no room for doubt: "**(Jesus) himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.**" Note that Jesus is the one who carried our sins in his own body to the cross. He is the one who bore the punishment that we deserved – the "**stripes**" by which we are now healed were laid on Jesus, not us. In this sense we cannot "follow the Savior," since he went where *only he could go*. God our Savior won forgiveness on the cross for every single sinner, including you and me, and his payment was a "once for all" event.

Our God *does* want us to follow in our Savior's footsteps, but not as little individual self-saviors. He wants us to walk as those who have already been freed from the slavery to sin, and liberated to walk in harmony with God's will. Does our God want to see us suffer? Obviously not. We have been called to serve and to imitate, but in so doing our God knows that we will suffer. That's why we need to stay connected to our God. That's also why we need to stay connected also to our fellow Christians. God's Church is a living organism – a body comprised of many parts. If we are not connected to those who share our Christian faith, something else will fill that void – something God would not have chosen for his beloved children. Listen to Paul's beautiful words of harmony and connection in Colossians 3:12-17: **Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,** <sup>13</sup> **bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint**

**against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.** <sup>14</sup> **And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.** <sup>15</sup> **And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.** <sup>16</sup> **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.** <sup>17</sup> **And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

God grant us an unbreakable connection to him, always, and an ever stronger bond with those who are his. Amen.

ESV **Acts 2:42-47** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

ESV **John 10:1-10** "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." <sup>6</sup> This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. <sup>7</sup> ¶ So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

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# ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Fourth Sunday after Easter – April 30, 2023**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 8 (Red Hymnal)

"Father, Who the Light This Day"

## The Order of Service – The Order of Morning Service p. 5 (Red Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Epistle Lesson:** (Acts 2:42-47) Last week we read how the Lord granted phenomenal success to the young Christian Church following the Pentecost sermon of Peter. In today's lesson we hear how God then gave this young Church a period of tranquility, popular favor, and rest so that the new converts might be further instructed and the Church strengthened. Difficult times were yet to come, so the early Christians used this time for internal strengthening. We would be wise to follow their example.

**The Gospel Lesson:** (John 10:1-10) Jesus here warns us that part of our hardship on this earth will come in the form of false teachers. It is only when we cling stubbornly to the Word of God that we can know the true Shepherd's voice as he calls to us. Jesus here also rules out any other path to heaven. Through faith in him alone we have Eternal Life. God grant each of us the grace both to listen for and to hear, with perfect clarity, the voice of our Good Shepherd.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 12. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 19 (Red Hymnal)

"All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above"

## The Sermon – Text: 1 Peter 2:19-21 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"Connected"**

## The Offertory – (Red Hymnal page 12)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn – 207 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Like the Golden Sun Ascending"

## The Prayers of the Day

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 207 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Like the Golden Sun Ascending"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

## Attendance – Sunday (28) Average (42)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Outreach Committee Meeting
<b>Monday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Study Conference in Bowdle
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Study
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Nathanael Mayhew is considering the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Seminary graduate Jonah Albrecht has accepted the calls to the dual parish of Redemption of Lynnwood and Ascension of Tacoma. Valley Bible Academy of Clarkston has called Teacher Ross Kok.

**Study Conference** – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend a Study Conference in Bowdle on Monday.

**Outreach Committee Meeting** – The Outreach Committee is scheduled to meet this morning during the fellowship hour. The meeting will be coordinated with the rehearsal for Music Festival.

**Music Festival** – Our first (annual) Music Festival is scheduled for next Sunday, May 7. The service will include a greater focus on worship through music. All who wish to participate are asked to gather in the sanctuary during the fellowship hour this morning.

**CLC Youth Camp** – Registration is open until May 31<sup>st</sup>. Camp takes place from June 11th-17th, 2023 at Camp JIM in Pillager, MN for students 6th-12th grade. For more information and to register go to: <https://youthcampclc.wixsite.com/camp> or email camp directors Amber Casto and Sam Rademacher at [youthcamp.clc@gmail.com](mailto:youthcamp.clc@gmail.com)