

Suffering for Doing Right

Grace and peace to you from Him, who is, who was and who is to come, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Amen.

Our Reading is taken from the First Letter of Peter, Chapter 3:

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called - that you might inherit a blessing.¹⁰ For 'Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit;¹¹ let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it.¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.'

Prayer:

Blessed Lord, you have caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read them, learn and take them to heart that, by the patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace it and not repay evil for evil but with a blessing. Amen

"Dear brothers and sisters"

- this is the beginning of the larger context in which our sermon text is written (2:11). And let's just say it, we are here addressed as beloved siblings. We all belong to God, that's why we are brothers and sisters to each other. And Jesus is our brother, through Him we belong together like the members of a family.

It is said in 1 Peter 3:8: "*have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.*" To put it this way:

- Care for each other, instead of everyone being for themselves first, and
- carry everything together, instead of acting against one another, and
- love your siblings, instead of fighting with them,
- feel with them, instead of hardening against them, and
- think higher of them than of yourselves,"

How wonderful, if this were the case among us!

"Behold, how sweet and lovely it is when brothers and sisters live together peacefully!" (Ps 133: 1) "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!" This is a piece of paradise. A girl said to her brother, "I smile every day because I'm allowed to be your sister and I laugh because you cannot do anything about it."

But nowadays it is more likely that: When Christians deal with each other, they tend to get into a thorny scrub. They do not reach a clear agreement, and sometimes they are rejected. On occasion the effort of brotherly love is undermined.

Our sermon text does not talk about all our wrongdoings although even the dearest Christian needs forgiveness every day.

For once, our bible text speaks of the injustice done to us. And certainly, each one of us can tell a story about a great injustice we have experienced when someone has spread evil, half-truths or slander about us. Especially when this is done behind the mask of noble intentions.

What happens to a Christian who is still trying to deal with another person in friendliness?

Is it not likely, that they will soon stop trying to live in love if their friendliness is rewarded with rejection? Evil wins the day and I myself would feel like I'd been thrown under the bus.

Sometimes you are not able to behave with love. In German we have some sayings: »*Wer nicht hören will, muss fühlen*« "He that will not hear, must feel.", »*Auf einen groben Klotz gehört ein grober Keil*. « "Rudeness necessarily needs to be answered with more rudeness".

And I have heard an American slogan which says: "A bad man with weapons can only be stopped in one way: by a good person with weapons!".

But the Bible objects and says a "good person", "Seek peace and pursue it. Turn away from evil and do good."

How seriously we following the Bible is measured by this: "*Do not repay evil for evil and abuse for abuse but repay evil with a blessing!*" So, we Christians, need to turn to our faith and to our heavenly Father. We are always His children! May we never be misled when dealing with others: may we always deal in brotherly love, even when we suffer injustice.

But you may ask why is it that when you refrain from repaying evil with evil, it still sometimes turns out badly. Well, that is what happened to Jesus: When he did not strike back when he was beaten, he fell deeper and deeper, even into death on the cross.

The Bible teaches us to reject the attitude of repaying evil with evil, whether it will be of benefit or of disadvantage to us.

We sang Psalm 103 before the sermon:

God heals your every weakness,
Renews your life within;
his grace and care are endless
God saved you through the past;
he leaves no sufferer friendless
But rights the wronged at last.

You may be wondering whether when you avoid returning evil with evil - does this reinforce evil? Does this imply approval of the evil power? Does weakness invite others to strike? Do not misunderstand this: Jesus has denounced repaying evil with evil, not to be a

holy sufferer for himself but to overcome evil. To destroy evil. This is what Easter is about.

It shows us that evil in the world does not entitle us to be evil, as that would simply replace one evil with another.

Whenever you return evil with evil, you are infected with evil itself. Jesus was not infected by evil - He overcame evil for us all. When we follow Jesus, we are never left alone.

The apostle Paul exhorts us: "Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). Our sermon text says: "*It is for this, that you were called - that you might inherit a blessing.*" And "*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer*" (V9.12).

Yes, dear brothers and sisters, doing good instead of evil has the promise of the final victory of good over evil. Let's ask ourselves: Why have Christians not strived to: "*Overcome evil with good!*"? It will be a true miracle when that finally happens.

"*But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*" We have to combine this with the first sentence "*Do not repay evil for evil*", then it will lead us to "*Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.*" (Romans 12:19/ Deuteronomy 32:35)

That is why it is not our business to "revenge" evil. We have to let that go and it can be a struggle for us. When this struggle turns to victory, it is always as if a "dawn of eternity" shines forth in our lives. Let us ask God for such victories in our time and in our lives! "And by Your power, let us pass our night."

We are the children of God and brothers and sisters to each other when we do not repay evil with evil, but instead overcome evil with good!

Amen