

Live Your Hope for Righteousness ¹

‡ **Suffering like Christ** (vv.19-23)

‡ **Healed by His wounds** (vv.24-25)

As the saying goes, “Hindsight is 20/20.” In retrospect some company leaders should have known. There were allegations of doping all during his career. But they named some of their mutual funds after champion cyclist Lance Armstrong. Seven times he won the *Tour de France*. When it was finally proved that he used drugs, his name became synonymous with stripping medals, total losses.

So similar is our new life in Christ. We have already been declared winners by God because of Jesus and the faith God gave us in our baptism. But we’re not there yet. Before the eternal victory celebration in heaven there are hills to climb, rivers to cross, valleys to run with enemies all around and inside us. We need to be “*dead*” to distractions, “*dead*” to drugs, “*dead*” to anything that might cost us our medal. The gold of our faith is more precious than anything. So lively discipline, exercise, and nutrition are absolutely vital. Whenever the Good Shepherd leads you into the green pastures of His Word and Sacrament, you grow in faith, trust and contentment. **Live Your Hope for Righteousness...**

‡ **Suffering like Christ** (vv.19-23)

In a dying world we can expect **Suffering**. But we need to know it’s right, its purpose, its limit.

Right – As law enforcement officials like to say, “You do the crime; you do the time.” Everyone understands that bad behavior deserves bad consequences. Even lawless rioters feel this way. They just want to set the rules themselves. But as Americans we need to learn that God did not send down from Mount Sinai “~~Ten Suggestions~~.” There would be no reason to write them in stone with the finger of God. Every violation will be punished, some on earth by men, all by God in hell – one way or another. God simply chose to pay the penalty for our crimes Himself. Now He warns that we can expect **Suffering** for doing what’s right. Literally, “*this is grace*” because only God can give the power and provide purpose.

Purpose – “*For this is favorable (grace): if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God.*”² Some of you work for world class companies where your decisions affect cities and countries. But even if your job is just for a family, being “*conscious of God*” means you are always serving Him, working for an audience of one. Your conscience won’t let you go. And if you suffer for doing good, you have God’s championship purpose: “*We...rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*” (Romans 5:3-4 NIV84) Since Christ is risen, this *hope* will not disappoint us. **Live Your Hope for Righteousness.**

Limit – God sets a limit on all **Suffering** because “*God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*” (1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV84) The Good Shepherd builds His sheep through **Suffering...**

Suffering like Christ has a pattern. “*Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps.*” We’re not on paved, protected roads like the *Tour de France*. Muddy ravines and snowy mountains make missteps dangerous. Put your feet in His footprints. Then you’re safe because of His power. “*He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered,*

¹ Grow Groups Series: “In a Dying World...Living (Your) Hope...” – New Life Pastor Joel Gawrisch

² *Evangelical Heritage Version, EHV*® © 2017 The Wartburg Project. www.wartburgproject.org. Quotes unless noted.

he made no threats.” The Apostles recognized this power in our First Lesson (Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60). So even though all the widows needed to be fed, they would not neglect *“prayer and the ministry of the word.”* Seven deacons were elected to the first Board for Lay Ministry, one of whom was Stephen. *“Full of grace and power,”* he did not hold back his witness even in the face of death. And as the unbelieving Jews snuffed his life under a pile of rocks, Stephen lived his **Hope for Righteousness** because of God’s promise to raise him again. **Suffering like Christ**, Stephen prayed, *“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”* *After he said this, he fell asleep.* Ours is a **Living Hope** even in a *Dying World*.

✠ Healed by His wounds (vv.24-25)

Life surely has its ups and downs. We naturally want to make it by doping, if not on chemicals, then on the drugs of sinful pleasures, money gods, and godless relationships. But listen to your Good Shepherd calling you by name – morning, noon and night. *“He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed.”* The very blood that flowed from His head, hands, feet and side washed your sins away in a tidal wave of pure grace and mercy. God gave Jesus a body just so He could do this for you. That very body and blood come to you in the Real Presence miracle of Holy Communion. “How this can be, I leave to Thee” that you say to me, *“This is my body....This is my blood.”*

This cannot be explained to human reason, any more than *“the virgin will be with child”* – promised first in the Garden that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head. And centuries before that promise came true the Holy Spirit said through Isaiah (7:14): *“The virgin will be with child... Immanuel.”* Then to the bachelor Joseph fearing to take Mary as his wife since the baby she carried certainly was not his, but the angel said, *“Fear not...conceived by the Holy Spirit...to fulfill the prophet...The virgin will be with child...Immanuel, God with us.”* (Matthew 1:18-25) I can’t explain it, but I believe what the angel Gabriel said to Mary, *“Nothing is impossible with God.”* (Luke 1:37 NIV84)

So now that we have this **Righteousness** by faith, *“Let us live up to what we have already attained.”* (Philippians 3:16) God says, *“Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.”* But He also says, *“I am the LORD who makes you holy.”* (Leviticus 19:2; 20:8 NIV84) Holiness is invisible. It can only be seen in righteous words and deeds. So *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV84) Our mouths speak His holy words. Our hands do His holy deeds. Read this great story in *Forward in Christ*, April 2017, pp. 14f. As Luther prayed, “Judge me neither right or wrong by my conduct. But judge me totally and alone in the righteousness and merit of my Lord Jesus Christ.” **Live Your Hope for Righteousness** – complete by God’s declaration now, yet to be perfected in heaven because *“by his wounds you were healed.”*

“For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” Even more literally we could translate, *“...you have now been returned....”* We are all sheep who love to wander. Wandering sheep like us cannot find our way back on our own. We’re always getting cast down, depressed – “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up!” A cast sheep is flat on its back, belly up to the sun. Freezing in winter, baking in summer – dead either way unless the Good Shepherd is ever vigilant, ever watchful. One video showed two cops in Australia running to the side of a highway, setting a cast sheep back on her feet, and fist pumping in victory. Our Good Shepherd is so loving that nothing pleases Him more than to have you back safe and sound, His own sheep and lambs flourishing in His tender, loving care. And Jesus is the *“Overseer of your souls”* who is so wise that He can couple God’s power and love together to bring about nothing but good for your soul. His goodness follows you.

So much more could be said on this. We need the whole summer. Along time member requested we repeat a sermon series on Psalm 23 with the classic devotional, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. Watch for the sign-up sheet to order, or dust off your copy in coming weeks. *In a Dying World* there’s so much reason to **Live Your Hope for Righteousness**. No lance, just a Shepherd’s staff. No cyclist’s legs, just the strong arms of your Good Shepherd – carried like lambs. Amen.

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