

**MORNING PRAYER**  
**PASSION SUNDAY**  
**03.17.24**

From the Second Lesson: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”

But some people are not only surprised but angry as well when they are called upon to bear some of the pain and experience some of the heartache of the world. As Christians, we have as our hero and the founder of our faith a Man who was a victim of injustice and died a horrible death before the age of 40. Yet we seem to think that we should somehow be exempt from the sufferings that others endure.

In many religions, especially primitive religions, there is assumed to be a kind of contract between a worshiper and the god he worships. The worshiper will pay tribute and offer sacrifice to the god and will try to live in the way that god approves. In return the god will protect the worshiper from harm and will, in fact reward him with a good crop or a successful hunt or with victory in war.

St. Peter is writing to people who have just come out of such a religion, and seem to expect that their new faith will work basically like the old one. If they obey the Golden Rule and come to church regularly and contribute money and follow the discipline of life laid out by the Church, God will protect them and reward them. There are people today who have the same idea, and some of them have been in the Church long enough to know better.

The Lord told us Himself that if we choose to follow Him we should expect to be treated as He was treated. St. Peter reminds his readers of that.

It would be nice to think that everybody gets what they deserve in life. At least that's what I think on those days when I have been righteous and devout. But the world doesn't work that way and neither does our religion. The Apostle makes that clear by focusing on the sufferings of Christ.

Between now and Easter that is what we will be doing. Next Sunday the entire Passion narrative will be read from St. Matthew. Each day of the following week, the Prayer Book provides for the reading of a portion of that story from other Gospels, culminating in St. John's account of the Crucifixion on Good Friday. After reading all that, and knowing what kind of man Jesus was, how can anyone believe that everybody gets what they deserve in this world?

The good news is that Good Friday is not the end of the story. There is Easter, when the world's judgement is overthrown by a higher authority. There is the ascension when Jesus returns to the Father who sent Him and receives the highest honor possible. There is Pentecost when God breathes new life into the world. And there is a day yet to come when the glory of the risen Christ will be revealed for all to see.

St. Peter says that when that day comes, those who have shared in the sufferings of Christ will also share in His glory.

One of the worst things about suffering in this world is that it tends to make you feel alone. It isolates you from those who want to help you but cannot share your experience. Jesus can and Jesus does. His sufferings unite with ours and draw us closer to Him.

“Rejoice,” says the Apostle, “in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also be glad and rejoice when his glory is revealed.”

Of course, people do sometimes get what they deserve in this world. St. Peter says, “let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a troublemaker.” When you are punished for such behavior you are merely getting what you deserve and you have no claim to share in the glory of Christ. But Christ did not deserve to suffer, and when you also suffer unjustly, and bear it with patience as He did, you too are glorified by God.

The glory is already in you as it was in Christ when He hung on the cross. That glory has not yet been revealed for all the world to see.

Perhaps even you cannot see it in yourself. But it is there. And so the Apostle says, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is coming upon you to test you, as if something strange were happening to you. But rejoice, in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also be glad and rejoice when his glory is revealed.”

**Written by: The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Rector**  
**Presented by: Ted Randall, Lay Reader**