

As prepared for delivery:

Suffering is mentioned more times in 1 Peter than in any other New Testament text.

Peter's not writing about any suffering. He is writing about the suffering of Jesus Christ and suffering in Christ's name. For Peter, suffering is a condition of being a Christian.

We have faith in the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ. But, because of this, we have a tendency to make all suffering redemptive.

Peter challenges this temptation.

Because when we equate all suffering with Christ, we can advocate staying in abusive situations. Suffering can become an excuse to not do anything about injustice or wrong. People told to bear abuse to be saved brings us right back to Tuesday's conversation about power and how easy it is to be complicit ourselves.

1 Peter was written to a small group of Christians, a minority in their culture, who lived in a hostile empire which was fearful of their beliefs and viewed them with suspicion.

Within this context, Peter is speaking only about suffering for the name of Christ. Peter is pointing to persecution for one's faith.

In some parts of our world, that persecution might take the form of being mocked or ridiculed. But in other places, this persecution involves the daily threat of physical violence, oppression, even death.

We should not be too quick to claim the language of persecution before we listen to and acknowledge the depth and reality of suffering for the name of Christ in our world.

And we must be aware of how suffering is understood in different ways across our communities and contexts.

Suffering is a tangible reality across our Communion – poverty, war, loss of hope, division, natural disasters lead to such great suffering

As God's chosen people, together, we are to be mindful of - and share in - one another's sufferings. To have compassion for those who are suffering. And to listen to one another in our vastly different sufferings as we imitate and follow the suffering Christ, our chief shepherd.

In 1 Peter 4, there are at least two actions that Peter commends to mitigate suffering: mutual, familial love and hospitality.

Today, we will talk about what suffering and hospitality might mean in our own contexts. Just like Christians today, the recipients of 1 Peter suffer.

In chapter 4, Peter goes to the heart of what suffering means for the Christian community.

His starting point is this: 'Christ suffered in the flesh'.

And just as 'Christ suffered in the flesh' so Peter's community is to suffer 'also with the same intention'.

That 'Christ suffered in the flesh' isn't a call to death and martyrdom.

'Christ's sufferings' certainly include his passion and death on the cross, but throughout his ministry Jesus experienced hostility, mockery, rejection by his closest associates, and economic vulnerability, as well as physical pain. They turned against him because he embraced those excluded and marginalised.

So believers should not be 'surprised' by their sufferings. That the community suffers should not come as a shock, 'as though something strange were happening to you' (4.12).

Suffering is for the name of Christ.

But addressing Christians with little power, Peter locates their unjust sufferings in the context of the Christian hope. Christ's glory is still to be revealed, and that glory is a beacon towards which his community is called to orient their lives. Suffering will not have the last word.

This hope for the future doesn't exempt Christians from acting and doing good 'now'.

So far in Chapter 4, the focus has been primarily on what believers are not to do, with a list of behaviours they are to leave behind.

Now, Peter reminds this community what is required of them. He begins with 'constant love for one another'.

This love isn't just for the sake of the individual or for salvation. The purpose of love here is inclusion and unity - 'for love covers a multitude of sins'.

With the theme of God's judgement fresh on the readers' minds, when faced with sin, and the behaviour of non-believers, the Christian community is not called to judge but to love.

This is a love rooted in the forgiveness and love of God.

Such language echoes the call in the opening chapter of this letter to 'have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart'.

This is the kind of love that will define the Christian community, and enable it to avoid the malice, slander, resentment and strife that happens if

we don't forgive.

But love isn't the only action that believers are called to engage in, for 4.9 introduces another essential element of communal life: hospitality without grumbling.

Much more than toleration and coexistence, hospitality is care, welcome, listening, creating space, protecting the vulnerable, compassion

The Greek word for 'hospitality' is literally: 'love of stranger'

A call to love the stranger is a fascinating call for those who are 'aliens and exiles'.

Because they share the same alienation from the world, they must offer a welcoming home for one another.

Just as those who are aliens and exiles have been given an identity as God's chosen people, so hospitality changes the identity of those who offer and receive it. They are no longer strangers.

Hospitality involves risk. It makes us vulnerable.

Some of the greatest hostility Jesus faced was when he restored others and shared a meal with them, when he offered and received hospitality.

Look at Zacchaeus.

Peter makes clear, however, that we do not have to – indeed we cannot – do this by our own strength. Christ and the grace of God remain absolutely central.

We acknowledge our dependence on God, and when we do so, we credit God for what he accomplishes through us, and we pray it might honour and glorify Him 'through Jesus Christ'.

Peter calls all to offer hospitality and support to your fellow Christians who face suffering and persecution for their faith. To be drawn together, not pulled apart, in our diverse and shared sufferings.

This text calls all, especially those who might be suffering less, to move toward those who are suffering and to support them with genuine love and hospitality.

And we think particularly today of suffering for Jesus' name. Others might ridicule us as a Christian, trying to shame those who are associated with the name of Christ, but this ridicule, for Peter, is an opportunity to honour the God who made the shameful cross a throne of victory. The God who makes the unholy holy will vindicate those who bear Christ's name.

The chapter returns not only to the suffering of Christ as the pattern for Christian suffering, but also to the assurance that God is a just judgewho will ultimately make things right. Even while suffering, the foundation of our hope is in God who will not fail us.

Loving one another and being hospitable is not always easy. We like to grumble, especially when such love impinges on the resources and the gifts we have been given. But all we have is grace.

Hospitality is especially an issue for bishops and their families because of those who come to their door. There is cost – economic cost, cost of privacy, cost of vulnerability. This isn't the same as suffering, but ministry has a cost.

Hospitality calls us to be with those who are not like us. It is the opposite of the security of exclusion.

But there is also great power and privilege in hospitality. There is power in saying 'no' and refusing to extend love, refusing to share what we have been blessed with. Wherever there is power there is room for abuse and for exclusion.

Think of the refugees in our world who do not receive hospitality and welcome from some of the wealthiest nations on Earth – nations which often identify as Christian. Think of the Covid vaccine, and the refusal to share it. Think of the way our economic systems exploit the most vulnerable people in the poorest places whilst the richest grow richer. We export suffering to our brothers and sister to benefit ourselves.

We are good at creating the crisis but not very good at compassion for those who face the consequences.

As more and more people are literally exiled from their land and driven from their homes and jobs due to the growing climate emergency, the call to offer hospitality – literally to welcome the stranger – is ever present and in many places, a matter of life and death.

Exporting suffering makes us numb. It hardens our hearts to our brothers and sisters and it hardens our hearts to God.

The powerful need to be hospitable to suffering, to import suffering. That means sacrifice – whether it's money or power. It means the powerful willingly becoming less comfortable in order to lift the weight of suffering from others.

This applies to racial reconciliation conversation, trade, employment, prices, vaccines, and economic power generally.

How as the Anglican Communion do we maintain love and offer hospitality, given that suffering looks very different in different parts of the Communion? How do we offer Christ hospitality, and imitate Christ in our hospitality?

Through prayer, Bible study, fellowship and discussion, the conference community will explore what it means for the Anglican Communion to be responsive to the needs of our 21st Century world. Read 1 Peter and find out more about the theme and biblical focus [here](#).

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