Good morning… good to be here. I aim to keep this under 15min as I am accustomed to speaking for 20-30 min. This morning I’d like to take us quickly through our 1 Peter reading in a more expository style. I have a habit of giving titles and sub-titles to my sermons. I have named this one:

**pp: *1 Peter 4.12-16: The Uncomfortable Road of Following Jesus.***

Let’s read the text. It will be up on the screen. Follow along allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us.

**pp: 12**Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. **13**But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. **14**If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory,[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Peter%204#fen-NRSV-30443e)] which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Peter%204#fen-NRSV-30443f)] **15**But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. **16**Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but glorify God because you bear this name.

Pp: Don’t be surprised as though something strange were happening to you!!! (v. 12)

***Pp:*** Ok, so who here wakes up each morning surprised that the sun has risen? [Some of us may be surprised that we have arisen for another day but…]. Maybe if we were to wake up at 8am and it was still pitch dark and it continued to be pitch dark for the rest of the day we would be surprised… because something strange is happening. But Peter’s statement explains that it is to be expected that at times, in different ways, we will suffer for our faith.

However, from this same phrasing (something strange, surprised) there is the hint that this is not an ongoing event. Peter possibly didn’t expect them to suffer all the time. Although for some, suffering for the Gospel is an ongoing thing. It will not be for all.

***Pp:*** If you are reviled for the name of Christ (v. 14a)… Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but glorify God because you bear this name. (v. 16)

Peter is obviously talking about being verbally abused or alienated here (reviled). We may not quite understand the impact that being insulted would have had for Peter’s audience or maybe we do. But first Century Mediterranean society was an honour-shame culture. Insult was more than just a criticism it was a threat to one’s social standing; -to your place in society. And of course the GR world was one that very much functioned on status and social standing.

But Peter is encouraging them to let go of such things. To not be ashamed. They are to deal with the potential loss of social standing that can come through living, in word and deed, as Christians.

Some Christians in the 1-2 century were killed for their faith, while others were relatively free to practise but were held with contempt or suspicion. After all, they worshipped only one God… [ironically known as athiests]. And by not worshipping the local Gods they could upset the apple-cart and balance of life –bad things could happen. They challenged the traditions and customs of the time. Perhaps, some of Peter’s first readers had their neighbours or former business associates, or even family members abuse and alienate them?

But here in good old egalitarian NZ what would cause us to suffer for being Christian? We have everything we want, don’t we? Beautiful beaches, peaceful, down-to-Earth, tolerant of all religions. A Christian history. Free to practice our faith. Surely nobody would revile anyone for being a Christian.

Just like Peter’s audience, if we are living out an authentic faith then despite how open and peaceful NZ is there are going to be certain choices and decisions we make that will clash with society’s viewpoint. These are the choices we make because of our faith:- Kingdom choices. Do go with the flow of society, try to protect our self-image & social status or do we do what we believe God would want of us. Micah 6:8 pp.

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Kingdom choices: To do what God requires; to act justly, to love mercy and to love our neighbour may involve financial decisions, decisions of morals and ethics, decisions about our time and what or who is important to us. Decisions about how we treat the down-and-outs, and marginalized of society. Decisions about our own generosity and selflessness.

Should I join in on this gossip session? Do I take some of those company supplies home my colleague just gave me? Do I invest in this unethical company even though the return is massive? Do I consume ethically? Do I join in on that conversation that dehumanises those on the welfare? Do I join in on the crude talk with my friends or work colleagues? Am I open to discuss my faith when the moment is right? Do I decide to work late every night or spend time with my family? Do I try to make myself happy by consuming things by keeping up with the Jones’?

***Pp***: A good example is in the movie ‘Hacksaw Ridge.’  Desmond Doss refused to kill an enemy soldier or carry a weapon into combat because of his [personal beliefs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscientious_objection_in_the_United_States#Conscientious_objectors_with_Medals_of_Honor) yet, he wanted to help in the war efforts. The first conscientious objector who was awarded a [Bronze Star Medal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bronze_Star_Medal). During the [Battle of Okinawa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Okinawa), he saved the lives of 75 wounded infantrymen.

By making these choices we can put ourselves in a position that may clash with the world’s perspective, which of course, includes the perspective of some people we may know. We risk how we appear to others. We may be mocked, excluded or judged by our own friends or associates. We may even be insulted simply because we are Christian

 [***can you think of any stories where this has happened to you?***]

Intermediate; Doug and Hayden…. Party scene, drinking and smoking…. Ended up ditching me and making fun of me etc. Spreading rumours and making my life awkward (graffiti).

High school… wasn’t girl crazy…. Some people hassled me and called me chastity king.

Now, of course, if one is persecuted because they are being self-righteous and holier than thou then that’s a different story. Yet, we can’t underplay how hard, isolating, alienating and testing Kingdom choices can be in our context. It would be wrong to compare this kind of suffering to those who face death, imprisonment or torture for their Christian beliefs but it is still a form of suffering as Peter shows us.

Pp ‘But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.’ . If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. (v. 13-14)

‘Hold up Peter are you suggesting that we celebrate suffering?’ Isn’t that a little morbid?

\*I need to suffer more for Christ! I’m not suffering enough!\* [dramatic voice]

No, I don’t think this is the case! I do not think that Peter is suggesting that we rejoice \*BECAUSE\* we are suffering. Jesus himself asked for the cup of suffering to be taken from him. BUT to rejoice is a way to help us through the suffering. To stay positive in the midst of suffering and to recognise that you are suffering for doing right. Rather than withdraw into ourselves or worse-case scenario give up your faith, push more into Christ and the church community.

What’s more it is an opportunity to identify more with Jesus and gather closer to Him. Jesus knows it, because he walked it too. It may not go away but to walk alongside others and God definitely helps us to keep things in perspective and to rejoice. And all of this is possible because the Spirit of God is resting upon us.

And just in case some people didn’t quite get what Peter was on about.

Pp: But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. (v. 15)

Quite self-explanatory here. Some suffering is our own fault and the consequence of unwise actions. We can’t claim those ones… sorry :D

I would like to conclude by giving us some questions to reflect on by ourselves:

***Pp:***

***Has your Christian faith made you uncomfortable? Why or***

***Why Not?***

***What Kingdom choices are missing in your life?***

***How have you reacted to suffering for doing right? Would you act differently next time?***

***How does your faith affect your understanding of ‘social status,’ image and reputation?***

***Has suffering brought you closer to Jesus or pushed you away from Him? How would you like it to be?***