

We need to talk about 1 Peter 2:19-25

On Good Shepherd Sunday, it's tempting to wander there beside the still waters.

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Danger, Will Robinson! Turn away from 1 Peter and do not look back. Walk slowly towards those lush green grasses and wander there beside the still waters of the beloved psalm. Just pretend 1 Peter doesn't exist. It's a good strategy.

Except that someone, someday will be reading their Bible at home (it does happen), and they'll come across this text. And if the church has stayed silent on it, they may think that their suffering is redemptive. They may think the domestic violence they're enduring will bring them closer to God. And we won't need to talk about walking through the valley of the shadow of death, because they'll already be living there.

So 1 Peter it is. The lectionary spares us from verse 18; at least we don't have to get into slaves being subservient to their masters. But immediately we're thrust into the danger zone: it's a credit if we endure pain while suffering unjustly. If we're beaten when doing wrong, there's no credit in enduring that, but if we endure when we're doing right, then God approves.

There's a lot in there to unpack.

First of all, I think we need to make it abundantly clear that staying in a dangerous or hurtful situation--whether we have brought that on ourselves or not--is *not* the message of this text.

There are times in our lives, however, when we will suffer, unjustly, for what we have done. Standing up to a co-worker who offers a litany of offensive jokes, preaching a word that the congregation is going to find difficult to hear, marching arm and arm in protest down a city street--these things can lead to negative consequences, to suffering. And that's ok--for we have chosen to put ourselves in that situation. That's very different from a violent situation that people would get out if they could. When we stand up, speak out, or march, we are willingly doing something that we know may result in our own suffering.

It's that willingness, I believe, that meets God's approval. Jesus, says 1 Peter, endured suffering because he was unwilling to return abuse for abuse--because he knew that his work was about something bigger. It was a choice he made.

He did it so that we "might live for righteousness." Standing up for what's right might mean that we suffer; it might mean that we're persecuted. But this is met with approval in God's eyes, because we're living as God would have us live.

And it's our choice. But when suffering is involuntary, it's something different altogether. And it is met with anything but approval in God's eyes.