

The Rev'd Misty Kiwak Jacobs
 Grace Episcopal Church
 Bath, Maine
 6th Sunday of Easter 2026
 1 Peter 3:13-22

I Peter was written to several Christian communities spread throughout Roman provinces in Asia Minor, present day Turkey. Christians were facing persecution for their way of life which stood in stark contrast to the pagans among whom they lived. Scholar Raymond Brown writes, “The Christians are alienated because they cannot live the way their Pagan neighbors do” (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, 711).

Chapter 4 is a little pep talk: “*Since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), so as to live for the rest of your time in the flesh no longer by human desires but by the will of God.*” Then the author of Peter spills the tea on what those pagans are up to, “*You have already spent enough time in doing what the gentiles like to do, living in debauchery, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry.* (I Peter 4:1-4)

We’re to live not by human desire but by the will of God. We’re to be finished with sin. That has never been popular, has it? As I’ve said, before I was a Christian I thought of churches as full old ladies who had a sneaking suspicion somebody somewhere was having a good time.

I Peter instructs Jesus’ followers on how to bear religious hostility, to live according to God’s will, despite abuse and suffering. (*Anchor Bible Commentary: I Peter*, 619).

Our lesson from Chapter 3 begins, ***Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?*** (v. 13)

The Anchor Bible translates “eager to do good” as *zealous for what is right*. Zealous means showing intense passion, enthusiasm or dedication. In scripture, the word zealous connotes

“moral excellence”. *Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed.* (vv 13–14).

Many of us know that following Christ, truly following Christ’s teachings, separates us from the world. Jesus puts us in opposition to the values of empire.

If your vision of peak Christianity of Easter Sunday 60 years ago, with little girls in white bonnets and patent leather shoes, and little altar boys like Christmas candlesticks and ladies in fine clothes and men in pressed suits and fancy brunch afterwards, I regret to tell, this is more a vision of American prosperity and conformity than of following Jesus.

Like Jesus, who was killed by empire for challenging the values of empire, we’re called to be a bee in the bonnet of earthly power that prioritizes the powerful to the neglect of the vulnerable and needy.

One of the ways to witness Christ is to express gratitude. Indigenous writer Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, “In a consumer society, contentment is a radical proposition. . . . Gratitude cultivates an ethic of fullness, but the economy needs emptiness (*Braiding Sweetgrass*, 111). Or in the words of Jesus, “*life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.*” (Luke 12:15).

Part of our sufferings as true followers of Jesus is that the loudest religious voices in our culture are preaching a false gospel antithetical to Christ, a false gospel of racism, xenophobia, misogyny and homophobia, that demonizes the immigrant and the trans person.

We all are called to live the Gospel in a world hostile to it, in a world distorting it. To that end, on January 21, 2025, Mariann Budde, Episcopal Bishop at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. preached at the National Prayer Service.

She addressed the newly elected President directly with the Gospel of Jesus Christ speaking in the softest voice, a softness I could learn from, “*In the name of our God, I ask you to have*

mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now. There are transgender children in both Republican and Democratic families who fear for their lives. . .

Have mercy, Mr. President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away. Help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here. Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were once strangers in this land.”

(<https://cathedral.org/sermons/homily-a-service-of-prayer-for-the-nation/>)

Bishop Budde was met with scorn by the powerful who derided the Episcopal bishop for preaching the Gospel in her own Cathedral. One member of the House of Representatives said, “The person giving this sermon should be added to the deportation list.” Bishop Budde was born in New Jersey.

(<https://thehill.com/homenews/house/5098959-gop-member-wants-bishop-added-to-deportation-list-after-trump-prayer-service/>)

I Peter 3:16b-17, “*Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil.*”

Recently the Roman pontiff, Pope Leo, was maligned for preaching Christ. He posted on social media, “*God does not bless any conflict. Anyone who is a disciple of Christ, the Prince of Peace, is never on the side of those who once wielded the sword and today drop bombs. Military action will not create space for freedom or times of #Peace, which comes only from the patient promotion of coexistence and dialogue among peoples.*”

Catholic Msgr. Arthur Holquin wrote in support of the Pope, “[Leo] *has refused to bless the conflation of the Gospel with American civil religion or with Christian-nationalist iconography. He has done all of this, however, in love. There is no rancor in his witness, no settling of scores, no theatrical denunciation.*

There is only the steady speaking of Gospel truth in a moment when much of the public Christianity of this country has quietly decided that the Gospel can be traded for proximity to

power.” (*“The Right Pope at the Right Time”*)

(https://open.substack.com/pub/liturgyandtruth/p/the-right-pope-at-the-right-time?r=13mi9&utm_medium=ios)

Power responded by saying “The Pope should be careful when talking theology.”

(<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/trump-administration/vance-warns-pope-careful-talking-theology-rcna331881>)

We gather here to pray for God’s mercy to descend upon the world while false Christians in power blaspheme God, praying for “overwhelming violence of action against those who deserve no mercy”. Who are those who deserve no mercy?

Jesus, the image of the invisible, omnipotent God who set the stars in the sky and put the universe in motion, did not pray for overwhelming violence to be brought upon his executioners. but prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” as he slowly succumbed to the wounds they had inflicted.

We are called to witness the Jesus of the gospels, the merciful and gentle, in our welcome, our inclusion of the lost, the last and the least, our concern for the poor, the Jesus who sat at the well alone with a Samaritan woman of questionable character and spoke her into wholeness, who healed the untouchable, cured the sick, and aligned himself with the humble.

Does our sharing in Christ’s body and blood in this place change us? Do we follow the promptings of the Spirit to do the next right thing, the loving thing, sometimes the hardest thing, the action that costs, the strangeness of bearing love in a world that does not expect love? How do we find a way to speak softly, to lovingly witness Christ without rancor?

vv 16-18, “Maintain a good conscience so that, when you are maligned those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.” Thank you, Lord Jesus.