

The first two words—*Dear friends*—from today’s Scripture reading are really one word in the Greek: ἀγάπητοι, which means, “*Beloved*.” As much as I like the NIV I disagree with their translation here in v. 12. Peter is addressing people he cares about. He knows that in spite of everything they’ve been through they are God’s *beloved*. If we can hang onto that in the midst of our struggles, we’ve got a pretty good chance of getting through it with hope.

*Beloved*, we shouldn’t be so surprised that we are suffering. Suffering is really inevitable. God in the flesh came among us and suffered until death. This world has a lot of things about it that need to be made new, and someday, they will be. But until that time, don’t be shocked by the suffering you experience, for if you believe for any reason that as a person of God you should escape suffering, then you’re going to be disillusioned and discouraged when life doesn’t go the way you had planned. You’re going to be tempted to believe that either God is punishing you or that God has abandoned you.

That’s exactly what Satan would like you to believe. Peter describes Satan like a roaring lion, prowling around, seeking someone to devour. Satan will do whatever possible to make God’s people believe that there is no such thing as hope or new life. The one thing that Satan most wants is for the people of God to lose hope in the God who loves them. Satan wants to make our lives on earth a living hell.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God. As a young person when I heard that I always thought humbling myself would be less painful than waiting for God to humble me. One of the phrases we hear a lot today is: “*Life comes at you fast*.” One minute everything can be fine, and in the next, it can feel as though the rug’s been pulled out from under us. When that happens, we usually pull back in anger or disbelief, wondering how God can speak of love when God doesn’t keep us from suffering. How can we humble ourselves when everything within us is crying out for relief because our world is collapsing around us?

Peter’s gives a gentle answer, framed in the word *beloved*: “*Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you*” (1 Pet 5:7). I like that Peter uses the word anxiety. Peter doesn’t say cast all your *suffering* on God, or cast all your *heartache* on God. Somehow, in the midst of the worst kinds of pain, we try to do that: to let God have our suffering and heartache. But the single, most difficult thing to do is to give God our anxiety, all of that fretting and worrying that comes along with suffering and uncertainty, when it comes.

That is the challenge: to take our anxiety, our worry and fear, about the future and give it to God. We want to see the end of the story before we’re willing to do that. We want reassurance of a good outcome; we want to know what comes next. When we get all of that information under our belt, then we might be willing to let go of our anxiety, but not until all of these things are safely in place.

The real challenge in being a follower of Jesus is to be able to humble ourselves before God and yield our lives to God’s gracious keeping before we know anything about the outcome of what we face or the direction it might take. This requires a deep and abiding trust in the One who created us in hope, who redeemed us in mercy, and who continues to sustain us in love.

We must be able to live this life one day at a time with hope, perseverance, and faith for no other reason than that God is with us. We, who hate uncertainty almost more than anything else, must resist the temptation to be plowed over by it. Instead, we must set our faces to the future—the future that God is creating for us at this very moment—and walk by faith.

Even if things are going well for us in life, there is no time in life when we can see the next step or see around the corner or far enough down the road. We might have an idea of what step we'd like to take, but whether or not we're able to take it is really out of our hands. We can't control life, but we have the freedom to choose how we respond to it and live it.

We can live anxiously, always afraid of what lies around the next corner, and we can let anxiety defeat us. We can let it depress us or we can involve ourselves in a frenzy of activity to try and avoid it, but all this will do is give our anxiety the power to affect our lives and destroy our happiness. Or we can turn to God and to those around us.

One of the greatest lies that Satan would tell us is that we need to get through our suffering under our own strength, and that our anxiety just goes to show how unreliable life really is. All you can do is brace yourself for the next blow and hope it doesn't hurt too much. That is no way to live. We don't have to be afraid of what tomorrow holds; we know the God who is still in the midst of us, creating and redeeming and giving life. Our suffering does not have the final word. No one in this world suffers alone. We may feel as though we are alone as we go through our suffering, but not only is God with us, so also is every brother and sister in Christ. We don't need to be alone unless we choose to be.

Look around at the people you see here today. These are the brothers and sisters God gave you to help you make it through this life a little more aware of God's love. We need one another and above everything else in existence, we need God. We need God's love to keep on going; we need God's mercy so that we have the energy to take our next breath. And it is here, it is here in abundance. It lies within us and around us. And in those times when we have trouble believing that, we must reach out to one another and be God's word of hope. We must go forward in faith.

Dan Conway wrote an article for the *Memphis Daily News* a few years ago in which he said: Nostalgia, always positive and selective, can be fun and comforting. But it can't be a destination. Don't long to go where you can't go. Long to make where you're going better. I couldn't agree with Dan more.

As a Billy Joel lyric reflected, "The good ole days weren't all that good, and tomorrow's not as bad as it seems." Let's make tomorrow terrific.

I'm also convinced the Apostle Peter would agree too, because he warns us not to long for the good ole days. He says, "*In [God's] great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" (1 Peter 1:3). Peter knows the world well enough to know that because of human nature anyone who is different is treated with suspicion. Followers of Christ are *supposed* to be different. The Christian faith serves as a kind of conscience for the world and most people would rather brush aside any twinge of conscience that could interfere with what they want. So if having Christians around interferes with someone else's plans, the Christians must go.

I believe that Peter is saying that persecution, on some level, of some sort, is *inevitable* for Christians. Listen once again to what he says: “*Dear friends—no—Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed*” (1 Peter 4:12-13).

God—and only God—restores us, supports us, strengthens us, and establishes us in hope. We need to remind ourselves and one another of all that God has done. We need to come here on Sunday morning to celebrate God’s love for us and to recount the mighty deeds of God and continue to live in hope. If God has done all of these things in the past, surely, God will act again and bring us to the glory that awaits those who humble themselves. God has got it all covered. It’s a simple but definitely not an easy way of life: “*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you*” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

In Jesus Christ, we are given the promise that God is at work in our lives even now and in all the days to come. We don’t have to wait for God’s love and mercy because it has already been given to those who believe. That is the blessing we are given. We can live through anything, even the inevitable.

Stop where you are and take that stone out of your shoe. That stone is only making your journey uncomfortable and more miserable. Instead, “*Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.*” Amen.