

## **“Love and Belief”**

1 Peter 1:3-9

30 March 2008 – 2nd Sunday of Easter

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Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

### **1 Peter 1:3-9**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Prayer.

As one stands before  
Calm baptismal waters  
And considers the Divine call  
To make them stir,  
It is important to consider  
The lineage,  
Tradition,  
History  
Of those who have parted the water  
Before you.

Water speaks to life  
Especially in a desert community.  
It is fresh as it first trickles,  
Then rolls,  
Down mighty mountain streams.  
It cleanses,  
Washes,  
Makes clean  
The soiled,  
Squalor of human sin.  
Just as water delivered  
Moses and our ancestors from Egyptian  
slavery,  
So too it served

As Exile's repose in Babylon  
Offering a foretaste of deliverance yet to  
come.  
Through the water of the womb,  
Jesus became more than God;  
He became  
God incarnate,  
God In person,  
God In the flesh.  
Through the same water,  
Jesus was baptized  
Into his life of mission and ministry.  
Water was mixed with wine,  
And was used to wash his disciples feet,  
As a sign of how deep God's love is  
For those who follow him.  
Water flowed from his pierced side.  
And it was by Tiberious' shore -  
The same waves Jesus had stilled -  
That he presents himself  
Resurrected:  
Salvation for all who love him,  
Who believe in him,  
And who one day,  
Will be reunited with him.

Before the calm baptismal waters

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One would stand  
While an elder of the community  
Would read  
this first of two letters  
from the apostle Peter,  
or from Peter's heirs,  
from their struggling faith community in  
Rome.  
Because of the style of the Greek used,  
The absence of personal reminiscences,  
And the internal references,  
Scholars generally agree  
That this letter was written by those  
Who the Apostle Peter taught, converted,  
And empowered with authority.  
It was written to give encouragement  
Guidance, and direction  
For those on the verge of taking  
The baptismal plunge.

Life was discouraging.  
Christ followers were thought of as cult-like  
At best,  
And as apostates,  
At worse,  
And fed to the lions or gladiators  
for morbid entertainment.

What would motivate one to take the plunge  
- To taste and see the baptismal waters of  
Jesus Christ?

The same thing that causes Tibetans to  
raise up,  
South Africans to throw off shackles,  
Martin King to lead waves of followers  
without violence  
into Birmingham's water canons  
and attack dogs.  
It is the same thing that caused  
Gandhi to lead the march to the sea  
And caused occupied Christians  
To hide Jews in their attics.

What causes one to take a punch

And with all humility,  
never strike back?

Suffering trials  
Being tested by fire  
Surviving unrelenting fire  
By the encouraging word of peers  
And the pure genuineness of faith in Jesus  
Christ  
Tempers the soul.  
It refines.  
It purifies.  
It makes the soul imperishable;  
Impregnable,  
Never fading away.

Early Church martyrs  
Recognized the immortality of their actions.  
Being tempered by God  
brings strength  
And power to the witness.  
It brings disciples  
Closer than mere observers;  
It brings disciples  
To the feet of Jesus  
And fills us with his eternal love.

Few understood this more  
Than Peter  
And the Roman disciples he led  
Into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Suffering without purpose  
Is lost.  
But suffering,  
When we allow it to point to  
The most fundamental truth  
- God's undeserved, unearned, unlimited  
love for us;  
when suffering gives witness to this  
the love of God,  
it becomes something to be embraced  
and appreciated,  
even associated  
with the suffering Christ endured for us,

and through it,  
we are made whole.

Suffering is not the enemy!  
Failing is the enemy;  
Yielding unto temptation  
Is the enemy.  
Sin,  
And all things that divide  
Us in violent or angered ways  
Is Satan's desire.  
But suffering,  
Especially on behalf of the Gospel,  
makes us stronger,  
More enduring,  
More permanent,  
More determined  
To serve Christ,  
And Christ alone.

Return yourself  
And stand before your baptismal waters.  
Consider this day,  
the trials and suffering that has brought you  
here.  
All your pain,  
All your suffering,  
All your sin;  
Let them go.  
Allow the waters of your baptism to  
wash it all away.

The crying  
Suffering  
And pain of this world,  
Having now been washed away,  
One obtains victory!  
The outcome of our faith!  
Even the salvation of our souls!  
Amen.