

PEACE WITHIN, GRACE WITHOUT
1 Peter 2:21-25

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Amarillo, Texas
December 5, 2021

My dear friends, Dr. Darin Davis, and his wife, Dr. Brenda Davis, both of Baylor University, were recently celebrating their 29th wedding anniversary. One of their three daughters, Crosby, age 12, helped them celebrate the day by texting her parents “Happy Adversity.” Of course, she meant to say “Happy Anniversary,” but perhaps she told the truth when she mistakenly sent the message “Happy Adversity.”

It wasn’t long until Crosby realized her mistake and quickly texted, “Oh, wait, that’s not how you spell it.”

No, Crosby, that’s probably exactly the way you spell it. Marriage is often, at best, a “happy adversity.” In fact, many of our relationships – workplace and personal, friends and family – are best described at the highest moments as an adversity that can be managed in a relatively happy condition.

Happy adversity. That was the message of Peter to the Christians in Asia Minor at the end of 1 Peter 2. “Happy adversity,” Peter is saying to the people.

Articles in every news source say what we have all observed. With the current conditions, we’re all on a short fuse. In fact, just recently the *Wall Street Journal* ran an article entitled “**Adults Are Throwing Tantrums – in Restaurants, Planes and at Home. Blame the Pandemic.**” In line recently at a Winn-Dixie supermarket in Florida, John DiDonna worried that a nearby shopper was standing too close for Covid-era comfort. Mr. DiDonna asked the other shopper to take a step back. The shopper, he says, stepped even closer. Mr. DiDonna says he snapped. “Do you love me that much?” he barked. The other person argued back; Mr. DiDonna retorted with “a sprinkling of four-letter words. He afterward said, “I was mortified.”

The theater producer in Seminole County, Florida, says he has a shorter fuse these days after 18 long months of the pandemic, grappling with decisions about masks during rehearsals, employee vaccinations, and whether and how to continue performances. “It’s the navigating that’s exhausting,” he says.

At home, at the workplace, and out in public, many of us admit to blowups, which we soon regret.

Airlines have been a hot spot, too. The Federal Aviation Administration initiated more than 750 investigations related to unruly passengers by September of this year, compared to just 146 in all of 2019.

Tensions are spilling into other workplaces, too. Jessica Carlson, director of supply-chain operations in Washington, D.C., says she recently snapped at her boss and threatened to quit. The frustrations of virtual communication with her co-workers provided the immediate spark, but pandemic stress has been wearing on her for months, she says. “For me to go to my boss, hysterically crying and say, ‘I’m quitting,’ is uncharacteristic,” she says. “I snapped.” (Anne Marie Chaker, WSJ 9/16/2021)

Everywhere, every day, and every way, we have no peace.

The second Sunday of Advent is Peace. We need to be at peace with God. Peace with our family and friends. Peace with our co-workers. Peace even with annoying strangers. And, ultimately, peace within ourselves. Peace inside that will spill over with expressions of grace on the outside.

One restaurant was so done with cranky customers that they put up a sign on the front door. “Be kind or leave.” Another restaurant has started a “no longer welcome” list. Don Mahaney, who owns Scratch & Co. in Pittsburgh, posted on Facebook, “Any guest who demeans or belittles the staff of this restaurant will not be welcome here any longer.” (Clare Ansberry, “Restaurants and Hotels Push Back Against the Uptick in Customer Tantrums,” *WSJ* 9/28/21)

When penning his first epistle, Peter is now old. He is living in Rome. He’s much wiser than he was when he first began to follow the Christ. He had walked with Jesus for three years. Jesus had taken him from being a fisher of fish to being a fisher of men. He’d been the leader of the Twelve – always talking, always acting, always reacting – often putting his foot in his mouth, often exploding and then thinking later.

It’s not Peter’s acting I want us to focus on today. Rather, it’s Peter’s reacting.

Reacting, it seems to me, is awfully important.

Sometimes we overreact, to say the least.

Anger is part of everyone’s emotional compass, helping us navigate the contingencies of life. Anger signals we have been threatened, injured, deprived, robbed of rewards and expectations. Sometimes, we must stand up and take care of ourselves and those we love.

The pandemic, with its extreme disruption of normal daily life and uncertainties for the future, compounded by economic distress, racial tension, and political ideological conflicts puts us all to the test. We find ourselves ready to react, to explode at the slightest provocation. (med-stanford.edu, modified)

Listen to the words of the Apostle Peter, now an aged man.

“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His

mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”

Perhaps Peter looks back and remembers how Jesus not only acted but, more importantly for today, how Jesus reacted.

He remembers how Jesus suffered. He remembers how Jesus was an example of how we, too, are to suffer. He remembers that Jesus committed no sin, that He was not deceitful. He remembers that while Jesus was being reviled, He didn't revile in return. He remembers that while Jesus was being spat upon, He didn't spit back. He remembers that while Jesus was being slapped, He turned the other cheek. He remembers that even as they crucified Him, Jesus cried out with a loud voice – words which echoed all the way to Peter – “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

He remembered how Jesus took our sins on His back, on His body on the cross, so we could die to that old sin and live to righteousness, for it is His wounds that healed us. We were running away like sheep, meandering in sin, but now we've returned to the shepherd – the shepherd of our souls.

Peter, now aged, thinking about how Jesus reacted, remembers that he himself didn't always react so nobly.

You see, the problem with judging our spirituality based upon how we act is this: We can plan to act well. We can plan to act like Christ. But you can never plan to react like Christ.

Reaction tells who we really are.

If I'm carrying a cup of coffee and you bump into me, I'll spill coffee all over your shirt because the cup was full of coffee. When you encounter me in daily life, when you bump into me with life's challenges and life's confrontations, I'll spill something on you. And what I spill on you will show you what is really down inside of me.

Jesus said in Matthew 12 it is out of the abundance of our heart that we speak. It's not how we act, it's how we react that displays our walk with God. It is how we react that spills who we are onto everyone and everything around us.

Peter had been spilling a lot of bad stuff on people. Compared to the way he saw Jesus react, Peter knew he had reacted poorly.

A. In Matthew 16, Jesus asked, “Who do people say that I am?” “Oh, some say that you are John the Baptist. Others Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But who do you say that I am?”

Peter answered – he acted well – and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” And Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

V. 21. But then Jesus began to tell them not to reveal His messiahship to anyone because He was going to have to suffer many things. And He was going to be killed. And He was going to be raised up on the third day.

Peter – here he is reacting – took Jesus aside and rebuked Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” Peter is saying, “Not the cross, Lord. Anything but the cross” (v. 22).

Peter reacted to Jesus’ declaration of suffering. And Jesus said, “Get behind Me, Satan!” He called Peter “Satan.” “You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

So here in 1 Peter, when the old apostle tells us he has seen Jesus suffer and not fight back, he’s seen Him reviled and not revile back, he knows what it means not to want Jesus to suffer. He had reacted badly at trying to keep Jesus from the cross.

B. (John 13:8). When Jesus washed the disciples’ feet – poured water in the basin, tied a towel around His waist, started washing the stinky feet of the disciples, road-weary, dust-covered feet – He came to Simon Peter. Peter reacted poorly. “Lord, you’re not going to wash my feet.” Jesus said, “If I don’t wash your feet, you’re not one of mine.” Peter declared, “Wash my feet. Wash my hands and my head, too.”

Peter – having followed a Jesus who suffers pain without inflicting pain on others – is remembering all that when he writes 1 Peter. Perhaps he remembers even then when they came to the Garden to arrest Jesus how he drew his sword and struck the ear of Malchus, the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear. Perhaps he remembers how Jesus said, “Put up your sword. Those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Don’t you know, Peter, I could call twelve legions of angels if I wanted. How am I going to fulfill the plan of God, the plan of scripture?” And Jesus heals the servant’s ear. And Peter, once again, had reacted poorly.

Jesus says, “I must drink the cup.”

Then, during the Lord’s Supper when Jesus predicted that they would run and scatter away from Him when suffering came, Peter said, “I don’t care what everybody else does. I will be with you through thick and thin. I will die for you if I have to.” That was the acting. That was the planned part (Matthew 26:35).

Then there was the reacting that showed who Peter really was. After Jesus had been spat upon, after they had beaten Him with their fists, after they had slapped Him, Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A slave girl came to him and said, “Hey, you’re one of Jesus’ disciples, aren’t you? You’re a Galilean. You’re with Jesus.” “I don’t even know what you’re talking about,” he said.

Then another servant girl confronts him and he declared, “I don’t even know the man.” Then a bystander, “Surely you’re one of them, aren’t you? The way you talk – I can tell you’re a Galilean.” Peter began to curse and swear, shouting again, “I don’t know the man!” The cock crows, and Peter remembers that Jesus had predicted he would react poorly. He went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:61 – the Lord turned and looked at Peter).

When you begin to look over the gospel accounts of the life of Peter, you realize that when it came to suffering Peter had not reacted well. When Jesus declared that as Messiah He would suffer, Peter said, “No such thing.”

Yes, I think Peter is in Rome as he writes, as he pens this epistle to the believers in Asia Minor. And he thinks about how Jesus suffered, how Jesus reacted compared to how he, himself, had reacted.

What about you? Do you blame it on personality type? On a hot temper? You can blame it on anything you want, but the truth of the matter is that when somebody bumps into you, what is inside of you spills out. How you react displays your real walk with God.

Vickie Vaughn, who gave me the idea for this sermon, said that she was very happy that grocery stores were now staying open 24 hours a day. She said that often she likes to do her grocery shopping in the wee hours of the night when there is no crowd. She noted though that during those late hours there are a lot of single moms – and they’re tired, real tired – with a lot of cranky babies going through the grocery store buying the food necessary for this single parent family.

She remembers one particular evening when she entered the grocery store and began her usual pattern – down this aisle and up the next. She saw a tired mom, probably a single mom – she couldn’t be sure. The mom was tired and the baby was cranky. And the mom began to belt and to pull and to abuse the child up and down the aisles. “I just can’t take this,” she thought to herself. “I can’t go through the entire night grocery shopping and watch this kid being slapped around.” So she decided, purposely, to start on the other end of the store and work her way backwards – do the reverse of her usual pattern of grocery shopping – to avoid watching a child being bullied by a fatigued mother.

She said as she started down the reverse order of the aisles, she noticed another mom – also probably a single mom, by herself, late at night – with a baby. The lady’s grocery cart was positioned in such a way that Vickie could see the baby’s face, not the mother’s. (You know how babies ride in those car seats at the front of the grocery cart.) She looked and saw that the baby was squeezing the Twinkies – just oozing the white between the fingers and the plastic. Just squeezing the Twinkies. She wondered what was going to happen next. She said the mom slowly, one by one, pulled and pried the baby’s fingers off the Twinkies. And she said in a gentle voice, “Please don’t squeeze the Twinkies,” and placed the chocolate mush back into her grocery cart. She picked the little baby up, brought it down to her nose once, and again, and said, “I love you. I don’t always love what you do. But I always love you.” She kissed the baby and put it back in the car seat. The mother turned, and now

Vickie could see that she was wearing a bright red shirt with bold white letters declaring, “Radically Saved.”

Both moms were tired. Both had babies that were behaving badly. The difference was Jesus.

Maybe it’s our children who could tell others what our walk with God really is. They know not how we act, how we appear in public. But they could testify as to how we react.

“You were abused,” Peter says of Jesus, “and You didn’t abuse back.”

How about you?

What about me?

I’m not asking you to check off a list of how you’re acting today. I’m asking you how you’re reacting. I’m not asking about your sins of action. I’m asking about your sins of attitude.

When someone bumps into you, what do you spill on them? The fury of hell or the grace of God?

If there is peace within, there will be grace without.

Happy Adversity! Only God’s people have His peace and can, therefore, stay happy in adversity. Crosby, age 12, actually got it right. God’s people have adversity, but they can react with God’s grace.

Happy Adversity.

Peace, Christmas peace. Come, O Christ, to save us from ourselves.