

Date: May 17, 2026 (The Ascension of Our Lord, series A)

Text: 1 Peter 4:12-19, 5:16-11

Title: “Toughing It Out”

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And,

‘If it is hard for the righteous to be saved,

what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’ [Prov. 11:31]

¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. [...]

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

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For a while there, I thought my battery-problem was just about solved. I’m talking about the battery in my cordless drill—which, from one angle, doesn’t owe me much. I bought that drill 13 years ago, and it’s only started giving me trouble in the last few months. But the maker of that drill gave me a Lifetime Service Agreement when I bought it! Under the terms of that warranty, I ought to be able to get a free replacement when the battery fails.

Problem is, *getting* a new battery isn’t easy. I’ll spare you all the details, but the result of the long phone-call I had with a customer-service representative, last week, is that *no*, the company *will not* be replacing my battery quite yet. That’s because it still *accepts* a charge when I put it in the charger, and continues to *hold* that charge for about 24 hours.

“How bad does it have to get, *before* you will replace it?” I asked the very nice lady on the other end of the phone. She couldn’t really say, beyond telling me again that *it isn’t bad enough yet*.

As you can imagine, I wasn’t very happy about that. My drill isn’t much good if I have to charge it up ahead of time, every time I want to use it. BUT—I guess that’s what I’m going to have to keep doing—for now! But believe me, I’m keeping those warranty papers handy, and the day this battery *totally* dies, I’m calling that company again.

As I was thinking about today’s second reading (from 1 Peter, chapters 4 and 5), I realized that that little situation with my dying battery is kind of like all of our lives. We too received a “*free replacement warranty*” from *our* “manufacturer” on the day of our Baptism.

Here is my baptism certificate:

“Stephen Lionel Chambers was baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... on the 25th day of August in the year of Our Lord 1962.”

Hands up: how many of you have your own baptism certificate too, stashed away somewhere in your house?

Actually, though, whether or not we have that certificate anymore, hardly even matters. As the book of Hebrews puts it, our names are **“written in heaven.”** (Hebrews 12:23) So, no paperwork at all is needed in order to make a claim on our baptism! As St. Paul wrote to Timothy, **“the Lord knows those who are his.”** (2 Timothy 2:19) That means that all of our “calls for help” to our “manufacturer” way *easier* than trying to pry the help we need out of some distant customer-service representative! God himself tells us in Isaiah, **“Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear.”** (Isa 65:24) That’s like having a direct line to the factory, straight from our cellphone. “Hey, I’m having a problem here!” (we say): “Can you help?” And God is always right there to say, “Of course! I see it right here in your file, that you have every right in the world to my assistance—because of your baptism.”

Even so, that doesn’t mean that God is always going to give us *everything* we think we need, right when we think we need it. As you may remember, last week’s reading from this same letter (1 Peter) promised that **“baptism now saves you.”** (1 Peter 3:21) We have to read the fine print, though, to understand what those words both *do* and *don’t* mean.

What the “warranty” of our baptism *does* include is a strong promise that God saves us (already *now!*) **“by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** (1 Peter 1:21) His resurrection, you see, has already “drained away all of the power” from our 3 worst enemies—sin, and death, and the devil.

- Christ’s resurrection has broken the power of *sin* by giving us a “fresh charge” every day, as forgiven (and therefore holy) children of God.
- It has broken the power of *death* by “surpassing” *its* power with God’s own even-greater power—the *life* that God always wants his people to enjoy, now and forever.
- And *by* defeating sin and death, our Saviour’s resurrection has broken *the devil’s* power too—since sin and death are the *only* two “tools” the devil has in his toolbox, to use against us.

That’s why Peter says as boldly as he does, in last week’s reading, that **“baptism now saves us... because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** In Greek, that little word “save” means **“preserve, rescue, or keep from harm.”** And that is *absolutely* what the resurrection of our Lord Jesus does for all of us, right now (today!) *in the spiritual realm*. That’s a warranty we can count on!

Even so: as I mentioned, there is this *bit of fine print* we also need to keep in mind. Being saved *does not* mean that God is going to “preserve, rescue, or keep us” from *every other* sort of trouble or problem that comes our way in any of the *other* parts of life. As Peter was quick to say, **“Baptism saves you—not by the removal of dirt from the body, but by the pledge of a clear conscience towards God.”** (1 Peter 1:21) Everything God *says* this “warranty” of our baptism covers, we can be sure it really *does* cover! Our *sins* are forgiven, our *graves* will spring open, and *the devil’s* own power is quickly running down to nothing. *That’s* the Lifetime Service Agreement you and I can count on! In fact, it’s even better than that. It’s an *After-Lifetime* Service Agreement you’ll never receive anywhere else!

It’s only just *life right now*, here in *the body*, that’s still a problem. As St. Paul describes our situation in 1 Corinthians 15,

“What is sown [in the ground] is perishable; what is raised [will be] imperishable.

It is sown in humiliation; it [will be] raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness, it [will be] raised in power.” (1 Cor 15:42-43)

For now, you see (on *this* side of the grave), you and I *are* still very much **“perishable,” “humiliated,”** and **“weak.”** We don’t hold a charge the way we’d like to. We can’t tackle all the sorts of tough situations we’d love to. Instead, we “peter out”—and that’s that! We’re done. No more zip, no more spark, no more juice.

This is the kind of situation Peter is thinking about in *this week’s* reading. This is where Peter is moving on *past* that “warranty” of our baptism, to acknowledge the real-world problems all of us warranty-holders have to deal with. And thankfully, Peter recognizes right away that we face these kinds of problems! We don’t just sit on a shelf, keeping a full charge all to ourselves. No, we are “out there working” every day, in all kinds of tough and challenging situations.

- Right in the first verse, Peter acknowledges that **“fiery ordeals”** come upon us, from time to time, **“to test us.”** (v.12)
- A little later, he talks about **“being insulted because of the name of Christ.”** (14)
- Then he talks about **“judgement beginning for God’s household.”** (17)
- Then he quotes from the book of Proverbs about it being **“hard [even] for the righteous to be saved.”** (18 / Proverbs 11:31)
- Then, near the end, he talks about **“our enemy, the devil, prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.”** (5:8)

What does all of that look like, in life?

- Well, if we took the time to go around the room, I think we would probably come up with quite a list of **“fiery ordeals”** the group of us have faced, to **“test”** us. Physical, mental, spiritual—you name it.
- The word Peter uses next, for **“being insulted,”** can also mean things like **“being confronted, called-out, taken to task, or shamed”**—that is, because of our faith in Jesus. Some of us have to face those kinds of challenges even from our own family-members.
- The **“judgement”** Peter says we face as **“God’s household”** is another tough challenge. Thinking of the church as a *spiritual* organization, it’s perfect!—holy and redeemed, a “lifeboat of salvation” in all the stormy seas of life. But at the same time, the church is not even close to being perfect, as an *ordinary* organization. That’s why we sometimes talk about there being *two* churches. What we see (with ordinary sight) is the *visible* church, which (like our “physical bodies”) suffers from *all* of the frailties and failures of life in this fallen world. At the same time, you and I also see (with the eyes of faith) the true existence, here in this world, of the *invisible* church! It includes everybody in the whole wide world who believes in Jesus—whether or not they are members of the visible church. At the same time, this invisible church *excludes* everyone in the whole wide world who denies Jesus—even if they happen to be members of the visible church! *That* is why **“the household of God” as a whole**, faces God’s judgement—the same way each of us does! We are no more perfect in our *outer* life (as the *visible* church) than any of us are perfect *personally* (as individual Christians).
- Finally, the last “battery-draining” challenge Peter mentions is that **“roaring lion, the devil.”** He’s the guy who’s happy every time our drill-bit runs into a knot (and bogs us down). He’s the troublemaker who gums up our blade with sap (so nothing moves freely). He’s the Great Distractor who fritters away our energy in all kinds of other ways so that we *don’t* get here on Sunday morning to “charge our spiritual batteries” every week, or top them up regularly at home either through prayer and reading the Bible.

BUT (most dangerously of all), the devil messes with both our power and our endurance (in spiritual terms) by persuading us *much too early* that “our sufferings are *much too great*”—so bad, in fact, that “we’ve totally had it,” and are “no good for anything” anymore.” That’s the sort of devastating spiritual temptation that leads to things like depression... despair... suicide... and MAID.

Granted: Peter never says any of that *directly*, using any of those exact words. But as you may have noticed, he does use the word **“suffering,”** over and over again—6 times in this passage’s 14 verses. In fact, this letter’s 5 chapters use the word **“suffering”** 12 times—only once less, than all the times all 4 of the Gospel-writers use it, in all 85 of the chapters they wrote!

No wonder the first thing Martin Luther says about 1 Peter, in the introduction he prepared for it, is that Peter **“urges [us] to be steadfast in faith, and to persevere through all kinds of suffering.”** (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 35 p.390)

That says it all, right there! The first thing Peter himself says (right out of the gate, in this reading) is, **“Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come upon you to test you, as if something strange is happening to you!”** (4:12) Troubles are not strange, right? “Life happens!” And life is not something any of us truly live when we’re “sitting on the shelf.” No: God sends us *out there* into the world, where he provides us with non-stop opportunities to *do his work*, day in and day out—whether our

“usual workplace” is an actual physical workplace, or our home, or our community, or the whole wide world.

God’s goal always is that we should be as active as we *can* be, when it comes to doing *his* work. Jesus told his disciples, **“As the Father sent me, so I am sending you”**—meaning, off the shelf, into the rough-and-tumble challenges of real-world problems. (John 20:21) That’s where Christians are always needed—

to help other people “*drill through*” tough circumstances...

and “*cut through*” the barriers the world tries to wall-us-in with...

and “*shine light on*” the distortions, and lies, and half-truths that surround us...

and “*drive home*” that marvellous “fastener” of God’s Word, that “ties together” him and us, and us and the world.

I’m guessing that you and I feel even more *weak* and *inadequate* when we think about doing all of that. As St. Paul said (in Romans chapter 7), we **“have the desire to do what is right, but cannot carry it out.”** (Rom 7:18b) *Thankfully*, God has *re-engineered* us, by calling us to faith in Jesus—so that we *CAN* tackle all the tasks he sets down in front of us. The power comes not from us, but from him. The Lord is the “charger” each of us need—and get “plugged into” every day, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul describes it like this, at the end of his letter to the Philippians: **“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation—whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”** (Phil 4:12-13)

That’s what Peter tells us too, here in today’s reading. Peter also links together our sufferings and our faith. **“We participate in the sufferings of Christ [himself],”** Peter says near the beginning of this passage. (4:13) Then he talks, part-way through, about **“suffering as a Christian.”** (4:16) Then, a third time, he talks about **“suffering according to God’s will.”** (4:19)

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, his disciples wanted to know if he was going to give them any “shortcuts” (*between* here and heaven). **“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?,”** they asked. (Acts 1:6) In other words, “Can you please *give us a permanent, brand-new battery* right away?” But our Saviour’s answer was **“No, that’s not how God’s plan works. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you”—just enough** power that **“you will serve as my witnesses in Jerusalem... then, in all Judea and Samaria... then, to the ends of the earth.”** (Acts 1:8)

Next Sunday is Pentecost, when we will be hearing once again about the coming of that Holy Spirit—who *is* an *incredible* power-source that all of us can draw power from, anytime, because of our baptism. But even so:

- Do our batteries still run down?
- Do we still run into situations we really worry about powering through?
- Do we feel like we’re out of juice... out of zip... right on the cusp of needing a battery replacement?

As Peter says, those are the times when—right in the middle of our suffering—we need to **“humble ourselves under God’s mighty hand, so that he may lift us up *in due time*.”** We can and should **“cast all our anxiety upon him, because he cares for us.”** (5:6-7)

Peter’s last words in this reading are also the last words in this letter (except for a few personal greetings). What a great way to end this Easter season, and affirm our whole approach to life. **“The God of all grace”** (*Peter says*), **“who called to his eternal glory in Christ—after you have suffered a little while, he himself will *restore* you and make you *strong, firm, and steadfast*. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”** (5:10-11)

What more for us to say than “Amen” to *Peter’s* Amen! “Yes, yes—may it be so. Amen!”