



THE WORD FOR TODAY

Peter's First Letter, chapter 3, verses 8-9,13-18

“Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another”

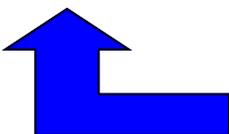
Among all the good wishes at the start of this new year, one of the most frequently repeated is for a peaceful 2024. We all crave peace in a world where conflicts rage, some quite close at hand, and where the resultant suffering of innocent people makes very difficult viewing. People don't find it easy to live peaceably with their neighbours. If they feel they have been wronged, the desire for revenge is strong. Self-preservation is often the paramount aim. The idea of compromise can feel like defeat. Yet Jesus taught a radical new way of living which sometimes went against human instincts.

Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, is writing to Christians across Asia Minor who were trying to live their lives as Jesus would have wanted and finding challenges along the way. His encouragement to them speaks to us today.

They were in danger of persecution, as are many Christians in our world today. We are not persecuted in Scotland, but Christian values are sometimes under attack and Christian views can be ridiculed. Peter's advice is for today too.



Follow the words of this passage round the church, beginning on the north wall of this little building. We are using the New International Version of the Bible, which you can find on the internet under Bible Gateway, and the whole “Word for Today” is on the church website, which is www.libertonkirk.net You can also find meditations and prayers on other Bible passages there in previous “Words for Today”.



Turn immediately left to find the first verses of the Bible passage on the bench

“Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.”

1



To live in harmony with those around us means that we have to give up some of our self-absorption. We have to put ourselves in others’ shoes and be prepared to put their needs and feelings first. We have to get rid of those long-held grudges. None of this is easy! But perhaps, if we want the peace Jesus offers us, it has to begin with us making an effort!

***Lord, help me to live in peace with those around me.
Let me not harbour grudges.
Help me to overcome my own selfishness and reach out to others.***

(No. 2 is on the bench facing us at the corner of the church building)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?”

2



One of the most challenging of Jesus’ teachings is *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”* (Matthew 5:44). Peter picks up that theme when he encourages us all to startle those who attack us by offering them kindness in return. He’s right when he asks the question at the end—most people met with such an unexpected reaction are totally disarmed and would find it difficult to continue with their attack. We do it, however, because Jesus calls us to love our enemies.

***Lord, give me the courage to resist the urge to retaliate;
to challenge my persecutors to change.
Help me to love and pray for them.***

(Turn round the side of the church to find No. 3)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

***“ But even if you should suffer for what is right,
you are blessed. ‘Do not fear what they fear;
do not be frightened.’***

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.”

3



Those who are attacking you in some way must be doing it because they feel threatened by you. The “threat” may be in their imagination, but they feel nevertheless that their security is at risk. Perhaps it’s to do with status. They must constantly be on the lookout for threats to their way of life or their views. Peter says that there is no need for Christians to fear anything like that—no need to spend their time worrying about what others might do to you. Invite Jesus into your life as your Lord, and his constant presence will be all the comfort and assurance you need.

***Lord, help me to keep you at the centre of my life.
Let me feel you always near me,
giving me reassurance and peace.***

(No. 4 is further along this side of the church)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

***“ Always be prepared to give an answer
to everyone who asks you to give the reason
for the hope that you have.”***

4



Hope is something else, like peace, which people long for. They envy people who seem to have it despite whatever life throws at them. Those who believe in Jesus have hope in their lives; they know that he died so that they could be forgiven, and rose again to give them the hope of everlasting life. They know that God’s promises are to be trusted. If you are one of those people, blessed with God’s gift of hope, be ready with your answer if you are asked to talk about it! Hope is precious, and it’s needed by so many in this world.

***Lord, thank you for the hope I have -
hope of a future after this life on earth -
hope of a glorious future for all when your kingdom comes.
Give me the confidence to share that hope with others.***

(Walk along the back of the church and turn left to find No. 5)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

***“But do this with gentleness and respect,
keeping a clear conscience, so that those
who speak maliciously against your
good behaviour in Christ
may be ashamed of their slander.”***

5



There's nothing worse than strident voices forcing their views on others. Gentle and respectful voices, however, can be more effective, especially if they come from people who can clearly be trusted. They will be listened to and are more likely to have a positive effect. In our noisy and often strident world today, gentleness and respect are very much needed. Following Jesus' pattern of behaviour has not gone out of fashion!

***Lord, help me to follow the example of Jesus in my everyday life,
so that it speaks to others of him.***

Teach me to treat everyone with gentleness and respect.

(Walk towards the front of the church, past the cairn, and turn left—No. 6 is on the first bench.)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”

6



If we do something wrong and we are punished for it, we know we deserve that punishment and that we have brought it on ourselves.

On the other hand, if we are trying very hard to follow in Jesus’ footsteps and then we are attacked for it, it may be hard to endure but we do have the satisfaction of knowing we were doing the right thing. God knows that too!

Lord, give me the grace to admit when suffering is deserved. Give me the grace too to endure suffering which is not deserved and to know that you are with me to support and strengthen me.

(Walk to the centre of the front of the church to find No. 7 on the central bench.)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

***“ For Christ died for sins once for all,
the righteous for the unrighteous,
to bring you to God.”***

7



In front of us we have the example of Jesus, who went through the most awful suffering and death, having done absolutely nothing wrong, so that all of us sinners could be offered forgiveness and brought back into God’s family. If our Saviour did that for us, how can we not try to thank him by living the lives he wants us to live, however difficult that might be? The words of Isaac Watts’ hymn “When I survey the wondrous cross” say it all:

*“Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.”*

***Lord, how can I ever thank you for your sacrifice for me?
Only by offering you my life and asking your help
to live it as you would want me to.***

If anything you have read has prompted questions you would like to discuss, please contact John Young on 664 3067 or jyoung@churchofscotland.org.uk



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PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDITS

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