

Seventh Sunday of Easter

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1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11

May 17, 2026

1 Peter 4:12-13 **“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.**

In the remainder of today's text from I Peter 4, 5 the Apostle speaks specifically of the trials that come to us because we are Christians. In fact, St. Peter writes in chapter 5 about elders and what trials they may face as they endeavor to lead the church.

Still, no matter the source of the trial, when trials come, the Christian is left asking to what end? In other words, what purpose does the **“fiery trial”** serve in the Christians life?

The woman's name was Janet Adkins. She was a mother of three and grandmother of three. She taught piano at home and English at a local community college. She had a full life and was a very upbeat person.

At a relatively young age, Mrs. Adkins was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. After her diagnosis, though she suffered from an occasional lapse of memory, Mrs. Adkins was vibrant and vigorous enough to defeat her son on the tennis court.

She and her husband talked at length with her pastor about their fears concerning the disease she faced. “As she and her husband got up to leave their pastor's study, the pastor said, ‘If this is the last time, I am going to see you, we should have a hug.’

And she said, ‘We sure should,’ and she gave her pastor a great big hug and went out the door.” Mrs. Adkins and her husband were members of the Unitarian church.

Janet and her husband left their home in Oregon very shortly after that visit. They traveled to Detroit, Michigan, where, at the age of 54, Mrs. Adkins ended her life. She was the very first victim of Dr. Jack Kevorkian.

Her body was cremated and her ashes were scattered at sea, and yet, her life, and specifically the way it ended, sparked a debate in our country that still goes on today.

Is there meaning in suffering? Socrates, the great Greek philosopher, many years ago suggested an ethic for living. He posed the question, “what would a life worth living look like?”

We have, as you know, developed a concept in our own culture, an ethic for living, if you will, that is based almost entirely on a subjective standard called the quality of life.

In other words, in our culture, Socrates' question, “what would a life worth living look like?” is changed. The question now is, is a life that includes suffering worth living?

Diminished capacity; diminished ability are both considered detriments to the quality of life. Therefore, for some, it is better, even more merciful and compassionate to die than to live.

As Lutherans we believe that, in His death and resurrection, Jesus defeated sin, death and the devil. And yet, we live in a culture that considers suffering a greater enemy than death itself.

An LCMS Pastor teaching Ethics to students at Concordia University once asked them if there is any value in suffering?

The students were rendered speechless by the question, and indicated that culturally suffering has indeed replaced death as the greatest enemy of mankind.

Now, as we consider this morning a theology of suffering, understand that you and I aren't any different than anyone else in the world when it comes to suffering. In other words, none of us welcomes suffering in our lives. None of us desires it. None of us wakes up in the morning and says, boy, I sure hope I suffer today.

It's not the way we're wired. And yet, suffering is part of being a faithful disciple of Christ. It's part of our lot, if you will, in life. Therefore, the Apostle Peter says, **“Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”**

When fiery trials come in your life, do you rejoice in them, or do you get angry at God and ask: why me? Why do I have to have these health problems or family problems or why did someone close to me have to die? Why am I suffering because of this or that?

We sometimes forget that God is in control, and we suffer for his sake. Paul tells us we should endure in our suffering and be patient, but often times we're not patient, and we want everything our own way apart from God's will.

We fall into sin because of unbelief. Acts 17:30 “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, in verse 15 Peter says: **15But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.**

But what does Scripture tell us about sin? It may come as a surprise to some of you that God's view of sin and man's view of sin do not match up. St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans that sin entered into the entire world through one man, Adam, and death entered with it.

Romans 6:3 tells us: “The wages of sin is death,” and all people have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, meaning that all people, as sinners, are dead before God.

The wages of sin is complete and eternal death; that is, a complete absence of life from our Lord and source of eternal life, Jesus Christ. Jesus gave us new life by his bloody death and resurrection victory on the Cross.

In our text, Peter is talking about the fiery trial that comes to us because we belong to Christ and, because of what we confess.

It is noble to suffer for who we are and for the sake of our confession. But there is nothing noble in suffering for doing what is wrong.

Beyond the suffering we endure for our confession, however, we don't need to be surprised at any of the other trials that we face either, as if all of our trials should vanish simply because we are children of God through Christ.

The fact is, under a theology of suffering Christians endure suffering, as do those who deny Christ, and yet, we are called to **“rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings.”**

We know that the only way we can rejoice in adversity, in the fiery trial, is because God promises us that there is purpose and meaning in them; He promises us that through them our faith will be strengthened, even purified.

The fact is, suffering without Christ is nothing more than suffering. Suffering under the cross of our Lord, on the other hand, is God's means to strengthen us, to humble us, and to deepen our faith, hope and trust in Him. It is, if you will, a divine exercise of faith.

But, haven't we all exercised enough!? That's a big part of the problem with suffering isn't it, our insistence that enough is enough, our insistence that we know better than God what is good for us.

Psalm 13:1-3 “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ²How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.”

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 “For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer ⁷Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.”

1 Peter 5:6-11 **“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” Amen.**