

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – June 23rd, 2024
BEEN MISTREATED

Prayer

Jesus, help us not only to turn the other cheek when mistreated, but also to recognize how we mistreat you and your gifts to us.

AMEN

Background

Today's message is based upon the Epistle reading. Paul most likely wrote this letter around 55 AD, in Macedonia about a year after the writing of what we know as First Corinthians. The church there seems to have repented of some of the sins noted in the first letter and we see Paul rejoicing at that change of heart and encouraging them to continue to minister to those both inside and outside the faith.

Don't Trip On Me

In the third verse, Paul highlights that fact that he and those around him live in such a way as to avoid giving people excuses not to believe – to neither give offense or to have their lives become an obstacle. This seems to echo his words in that first letter (1 Cor 9:22):

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I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some

In the following verses, Paul also makes it clear that they had done nothing to deserve their mistreatment; in doing so, he and Peter agree, because Peter wrote (1 Pet 2:19-20):

For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

Mistreated

I'm showing my age, but in reading list of hardships, the Paul and his companions endured, I was reminded of an old song covered by Linda Rondstadt in the 70's where the various choruses include:

- *I've been cheated*
- *I've been pushed 'round*
- *Been mistreated*
- *I've been made blue*
- *I've been put down*
- *I've been lied to*

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And each chorus ending with the tag line – *When will I be loved?* In the song, the singer was mistreated by men who broke her heart, but in Paul's case, it was by the Jewish community who beat and persecuted him because they saw his message about Jesus as blasphemy and heresy.

The Jews in those primarily Greek cities had most likely heard about Paul's zealous persecution of Christians and his subsequent conversion; many viewed him as a traitor to orthodox Judaism. They could not accept that Jesus the son of Joseph had been the promised messiah, the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies.

Response to Mistreatment

The response to this mistreatment was two-fold. First, they did not respond in kind – they endured and followed Jesus's teaching as recorded in Matthew (5:39-40):

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But I [Jesus] say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

In this action of forgiveness, of not holding their sins against them, Paul is imitating Christ, who forgives all of our sins even while we are yet sinners.

Second, they continued to do what they had been called to do, in whatever circumstances they found themselves in. Paul echoed these words several years later in the letter to the Phillipians (4:12-13)

I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

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Reiteration of the Message

Earlier I spoke of the temporal reasons why the Jewish community hated Paul. However, an underlying spiritual reason was driving those temporal responses. The Jews wanted to be justified according to the law. They wanted to do something, to prove they were worthy, to in some way contribute to their justification before God. This is always the response of our fallen nature – be it within Christianity or outside of it, to have a faith based on what we have done rather than one based on when God in Christ has already done for us.

In His life, death, and resurrection, the words and actions of Jesus shout out the truth – your sins are forgiven! You're mine! Your relationship with our creator has been restored!

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Unrequited Love

In the closing verses, Paul laments that the believers at Corinth haven't shown as much love to him and his companions as Paul's group have shown to the church. Going back to the song, these words echo the tag line – *When will I be Loved?* But this unequal love is not just for the past. Let's turn the song around – we confess that we have not loved God with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. Indeed, Jesus loves us more than we love Him. Because we are fallen, we can't comprehend just how much God loves us. But we can, based upon the little that we can understand, we can respond with thanks and praise for the gifts of new life, the indwelling Holy Spirit and the sure hope of life eternal with God in Heaven.

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Exhortation

In closing, I would like to make Paul's words to the church my words to you. In the NLT, the first two verses read as follow:

As God's partners, we beg you not to accept this marvelous gift of God's kindness and then ignore it. For God says,

"At just the right time, I heard you.

On the day of salvation, I helped you."

Indeed, the "right time" is now. Today is the day of salvation.

Today, we began by remembering our baptism, where God adopted **you** as His own child. You heard earlier today in the absolution that **ALL your** sins have been forgiven. You've listened to the readings and the sermon and by God's grace His Word has produced faith **in you**. Now, **you're** invited to our Lord's table to taste and see that the Lord is indeed good. I pray that each of you would continue to avail yourselves of God's means of grace to sustain you until life everlasting.

AMEN