

"Connected"

Text: 1 Peter 2:19-25

May the love of God the Father fill you with wonder; may the sacrifice of God the Son fill you with thanksgiving; and may the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit fill you with comfort, faith, and hope. Amen.

Fellow Servants of our Lord Jesus: Christians need to do a better job of gleaning from the world around us what is actually true, and then co-opting it, using whatever we have learned in the service of our Lord. It's not as difficult as it may sound. In fact the process is fairly simple and straightforward. It just takes honesty, objectivity, and a little thought. The first step is to identify trends, to figure out the appeal or basis of those trends, and then to use what you've observed to serve and glorify God. For example, no one needs to tell you that social networking is a modern trend of our times. Everyone here has probably heard of social networks like Facebook and Twitter. I'm guessing most of you have such an account or have access to one through a friend or family member. Having identified the trend, the next step (which can be the most challenging) is figuring out what makes social networking sites (like Facebook) so popular. A simple rule will help you here: *If it's of the world, look for basic, sinful motivation or appeal.* That sounds cynical, but God's Word tells us exactly what to expect from the human heart, and none of it is pretty. **"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander."** (Matthew 15:19) So what is it that drives the insane popularity of social networks like Facebook? For Christians it can be something as benign (or even laudable) as the desire to stay connected with loved ones. For some it can be the desire to be entertained or amazed. But the real drivers for the godless are pride, self-love, and the desire to be admired, even envied.

Satan has his own motives, of course. The devil understands not only the basic sinful desires of the human heart; he fully understands the raw power of networking and group thought. Think of it in terms of a bucket brigade. Rural folk quickly discovered how much more efficient it was to line up 50 people between the burning building and the water source (and to pass buckets back and forth) than it was to have 50 people running to and fro on their own. Disturbingly enough the same holds true with evil. Sociologists long ago identified what is commonly known as "mob mentality," or the fact that people in a crowd often do terrible things that they would never think to do on their own. The problem actually goes even deeper than that. Suppose you have a conversation with one of your neighbors and he goes off on a nutty, godless tangent about something or other. You shrug it off and move on. Then you talk to two other neighbors and they spout the same nonsense. You would probably still shrug it off with a *"Man oh man, do I have nutty neighbors,"* but the fact that several have said the same thing makes you think about the very thing you easily dismissed from only one source. Now imagine you read the

same thing on Facebook, from an otherwise admired or respected source, and notice that his post has gained about 5,000 likes and only a couple of dislikes. Finally, suppose you don't know what you do about the Word of God, and you begin to understand the power of thought networking. Your natural desire for acceptance and popularity kicks in and you begin to waver. I have no doubt that Satan is social media's biggest fan. He uses it to harness the power and popular appeal of group evil, of group thought.

So, we've identified the trend and we have figured out what makes it tick. How then do we go about co-opting it? How do we turn a force for evil into something positive? Understand, first of all, that by its very nature social networking will never be conducive to spreading the gospel. The power of networking is the masses. The masses form the "thought tide" that sweeps others into its flow. True Christianity will never enjoy that sort of popularity because it A) conveys God's attitude toward sin, and B) contradicts man's natural ideas of how anyone is saved (by grace rather than works.) True Christianity will never "trend" on social networking forums.

What we do learn is how important it is to get and remain connected – to your God and to your fellow Christians. Our text will expand on this basic truth. That text is found in Peter's First Epistle, the 2nd Chapter:

^{ESV} **1 Peter 2:19-25** *For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

So far the Word of our God. What a joy and a privilege to possess these words of timeless truth as our sure and constant guide. That our God would bless our study of these perfect words, that he would better connect us to himself through these his words this morning, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

The devil, as you know, is nothing if not clever. That means that while the devil is neither omnipotent nor omniscient (he isn't all-powerful and doesn't know all things) he learns from his mistakes and remembers what works. Not just in general; he knows what works best on you. He is at war against

all that God loves, and he has absolutely nothing better to do with the time that is left to him than to seek to destroy whatever God cherishes – which is you. Since he can't take God's Word out of the world, he will seek to twist that Word.

Here's an example of how the devil operates within the confines of Christianity. Jesus warned his followers that they would have hardship on earth if they followed in his footsteps. Satan promptly began twisted that truth to bring about truly ghastly atrocities. In other words, heinous actions were carried out by so-called Christians in the name of their religion. This sort of thing probably reached its low-point during the days of the Inquisition. When those who carried out such horrible atrocities were condemned by their Christian peers, or by society in general, the inquisitors actually took all such criticism as *validation* that they were doing God's will. They were, after all, suffering for their actions, and in this they took great comfort. They undoubtedly wore their "persecution" as a badge of honor and trotted it out as evidence that they were *"suffering for their Lord."*

More modern examples are all around us. Many of you have seen those who, professing to be Christians, from time to time stand at busy intersections here in Bismarck, shaking their Bibles and screaming at passing motorists. Given the fact that no one can even hear what they are saying, I'm not sure what they think they are accomplishing – other than making Christianity look nutty and repulsive. You know there is something wrong when even devout Christians are embarrassed by their conduct. Now, if God had somewhere in his Word told us to do things like that, we would gladly do so – trusting God to know whether or not such things are effective. It was obviously for good reason that God gave no such command in his Word. Yet I have no doubt that any hardship or persecution those folks experience is also worn as a badge of honor and regarded as evidence that they are doing what God told them to do. There is a big difference between suffering for walking in harmony with God's will and actively seeking out persecution.

God the Holy Spirit addressed this sort of thing in our text for this morning: ***"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."*** What does that mean in practical terms? It means that suffering, like group think, is absolutely no indication of whether one is thinking or acting rightly or wrongly. The key, as we will see over and over again, is to remain connected to our God, who will never lead us into foolishness or sin. The opposite is also therefore true: remove God from your life and you have no hope but to be swept into stupidity, sin, and unbelief with the rest of the godless. Following popular thoughts or trends would be like asking the devil to program your GPS and yet imagining that you will still one day arrive at God's heaven.

Remember, the great Christian Commission or goal is not to correct social ills and injustices but to save souls. True reform never precedes conversion. It does, however, follow naturally after an unbeliever is called to faith.

There are many other much more subtle examples all around us – and often *in our own lives*. Christian churches are now condoning and even promoting sinful lifestyles of every imaginable sort. This is just another symptom of being disconnected from God and his Work – of failing to be ***"mindful of God"*** as our text put it – and being connected instead to the world around us. If God isn't allowed to determine right and wrong, man will do it on his own. What we are seeing is that those who are living in open sin and rebellion against God's Word and will now believe that *they* are the ones being persecuted – *by other Christians*.

Again, the Holy Spirit through Peter addressed this nonsense in our text when he said, ***"For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?"***

The relation all of this has to our sermon theme (*Connected*) ought to be obvious. The term used in our text (***"mindful of God"***) means always being connected to our Creator-God. It means always considering every thought, word and action according to how God views it, and according to his will for our lives. The fact of life for a Child of God in a sinful world is that we don't have to seek out persecution. Humbly and devoutly follow God's will in every aspect of your life *and persecution will find you*. Gently try to recall someone from the sin that has taken ownership of them and you will suffer. Patiently try to share sin and grace with an unbeliever and most will ridicule you for it. Humbly refuse to pretend that all Christian churches are the same and most will despise you for it.

The difference with this sort of persecution is that you are suffering for doing what God *has actually told you to do*. Again from our text: ***For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly... If when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.*** The fact is we cannot, with any degree of certainty, know good from evil or right from wrong if we are not intimately and uninterruptedly connected to our One Source of all truth.

What we read next in our text is a perfect example. With the words ***"Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps,"*** our text *seems* to be telling us that we were called to suffer wrongfully for doing what is right, just like Jesus himself. Is that possible? Can our calling in this life really be to suffer, like Jesus did? Is that really why we were called into the Christian faith and what our God wants for our lives? Is that really what our text is saying? Remain

intimately connected to God through his Word and you will know the answer.

Does our God want us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus? Our text certainly seems to say just that: **"Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps."** Yet we have to define and qualify our terms here, since the devil loves to distort and pervert even the simplest Bible truths. In this case, Satan has successfully misrepresented these words to sow the seed that Jesus didn't actually win our salvation and the full and complete forgiveness for all of our sins. He **"left us an example"** of how we must earn our own passage. According to Satan, it is only when we do as Jesus did that we can have any confidence that God the Father loves us and will accept us into the heavenly mansions. In other words, Jesus didn't do it for us; he showed us how to do it for ourselves. Not surprisingly, social networking eats this stuff up.

Yet when you are connected to God and his Word, all doubt is dispelled as our *text* continues: **"(Jesus) himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."** Note that Jesus is the one who carried our sins in his own body to the cross. He is the one who bore the punishment that we deserved. The **"stripes"** by which we are now healed were laid on Jesus, not us. In this sense we cannot "follow the Savior," since he went where only *he* could go. God our Savior won forgiveness on the cross for every single sinner, including you and me, and his payment was a "once for all" event.

Our God *does* want us to follow in our Savior's footsteps, but not as little individual self-saviors. He wants us to walk as those who have already been freed from the slavery to sin, and liberated to walk in harmony with God's will – *as Jesus did*. Again our text points the direction for us: **"He (Jesus) committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."**

Can you see how a better, more intimate connection to God's Word dispels all nonsense here and reinforces the truth of our Christian faith? Can you also then see how that bond, that connection with like-minded Christians can also serve to strengthen our connection to our God? Our purpose on this earth is to save souls – to **"make disciples of all nations."** Our purpose is life – eternal life – for ourselves and for our neighbor. For this we need our God, every moment of every day. We also need the strength and encouragement that God gives us through each other, our fellow Christians. Maintain and strengthen these bonds and you will have the strength and courage to carry out your one great purpose in life with great enthusiasm, skill, and determination. You will also be able to distinguish between popular myth and Godly truth, for Jesus himself told us, **"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."** (John 8:31-32)

This is our calling. This is our purpose. Acknowledge it, accept it, and order your life accordingly. So help us God. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Acts 2:42-47** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

^{ESV} **John 10:1-10** "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷ ¶ So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

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The Fifth Sunday after Easter – May 7, 2017

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 196 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"I Am Content, My Jesus Liveth Still"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Acts 2:42-47) Last week we read how the Lord granted phenomenal success to the young Christian Church following the Pentecost sermon of Peter. In today's lesson we hear how God then gave this young Church a period of tranquility, popular favor, and rest so that the new converts might be further instructed and the Church strengthened. Difficult times were yet to come, so the early Christians used this time for internal strengthening. We would be wise to follow their example.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 84 (Page 38)

The Gospel Lesson: (John 10:1-10) Jesus here warns us that part of our hardship on this earth will come in the form of false teachers. It is only when we cling stubbornly to the Word of God that we can know the true Shepherd's voice as he calls to us. Jesus here also rules out any other path to heaven. Through faith in him alone we have Eternal Life. May each of us learn to both listen for and hear, with perfect clarity, the voice of our Good Shepherd.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 207 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Like the Golden Sun Ascending"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Peter 2:19-25 (Printed on the back page)

"Connected"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 205 (Red Hymnal)

"The Day of Resurrection"

The Offering

The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Closing Hymn – 207 (Stanzas 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Like the Golden Sun Ascending"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (42) Ave (44)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
	-11:20 a.m.	– Fellowship Meal
	-12:00 p.m.	– Voters and WF Meetings
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time

CLC News – Pastor Matthew Hanel is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato. The following seminary graduates have accepted their respective calls: Samuel Rodebaugh to Immanuel of Winter Haven; Thomas Naumann to Mt Zion of Detroit; and Stefen Sonnefeld to Faith of St Louis. Teacher Paul Tiefel III is considering the call to St Stephen of San Francisco. Mr. Karl Olmanson has returned the teaching call to Grace of Sleepy Eye. That congregation has now called Teacher David Bernthal, Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac. Redeemer of Cheyenne has called Teacher Lane Fischer, Immanuel Mankato. A summary of last week's synodical meetings is available on the entry table. A summary will also be presented by the Pastor at the Quarterly Voters' meeting his morning.

Fellowship Meal and Meetings – A fellowship meal is planned for this morning after church, followed by meetings of both the Women's Fellowship and the Voters Assembly.

Delegates Needed – St Paul is looking for two delegates to represent our congregation at the West Central Delegate Conference in Valentine, NE on May 31 – June 1. Please speak to President Mark Johnson if you would be willing and able to serve in this capacity.