

*The Crown* on Netflix is one of my favorite shows. Some time back, I was watching Season 3 that included the story line of Princess Alice, Prince Philip's mother. In Episode 4, a journalist tells her story, one that Prince Philip did not know. He goes to her and finds her praying. He reads to her this quote from the newspaper article: "For Princess Alice is the rarest of creatures, a member of a royal family that has suffered more than the rest of us, worked harder than the rest of us, and created more good than the rest of us. Congenitally deaf, she was consistently misunderstood, marginalized and underestimated. Doctors inflicted untold horrors on her, [experimental treatments and electric shock], but instead of bitterness, Princess Alice dedicated her life to charity work, public service, and campaigning for social justice, often at great personal risk." Even after experiencing horrific abuse, she responds by making the world a better place. What an example to follow!

The scripture for today gives similar instruction to people who are enslaved in abusive situations. Peter was actually writing to literal slaves, and he instructs that they should not respond to their abuse with abuse. Peter teaches that they should "patiently endure unjust treatment" (v.19). Now, this doesn't mean that women should suffer silently in domestic abuse nor does it mean that children should endure bullying. What it means is that we will all be held responsible for how we react in those situations. If we respond to hate with hate, violence with violence, then we will be judged for our responses.

Peter is suggesting that we find better ways to solve abusive situations: the bullied child tells an adult; the abused

woman seeks a way out through law enforcement or other support agencies. Because how we respond to these situations leaves a witness about our faith.

We are in a trying time right now, and how we respond during the pandemic certainly leaves a witness about our faith. If we protest and cause civil discourse, we are putting a fearful and angry witness into the world. If we respect the government's restrictions, even if we don't agree with them, by wearing a mask in public and practicing social distancing, we are putting a loving witness out into the world. You may have seen the FB post that has been going around this week about wearing masks. People declare that they wear a mask as an act of love for neighbor, because we just don't know if we are asymptomatic carriers. No matter how tired or isolated or stressed we feel, we respond to this pandemic with acts of love. That's the example or witness Christ invites us to live.

If we plot and seek revenge in our restrictive or abusive situations, we will be judged for that response just as the abusers will be judged for their actions. Peter says to leave the judgement to the One who "judges fairly" (v. 23). God will judge everyone the same, because everyone is part of the body of Christ. We are all equal, and even the slaves that Peter is writing to, are called to do good (v.21), to participate in the community, to have a voice.

Marjorie Thompson, writer of *The Way of Forgiveness*, says: "There is so much we do not see and cannot know about those who wound us, even in our families. It is one reason we need to find ways to tell our deep stories and to hear one another's deep stories. It also reveals why we do well to leave judgment to the searcher of all hearts,

who comprehends the internal as well as external realities of each situation.”<sup>1</sup>

Princess Alice was able to leave the judgment to God, and so was Christ.

Peter says it is possible for us to do that because Christ suffered yet “left his case in the hands of God” (v.23). Christ is the ultimate living example. Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example to follow, to endure suffering and trials. “This is the kind of life we’ve been invited into, the kind of life Christ lived. He suffered everything that came his way so we would know that it could be done, and also know how to do it, step-by-step “(v.21-25, *The Message*).

Let’s break down the example Christ leaves us, according to Peter:

One: Jesus “never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone” (v.22). Now, our humanness gets in the way and we will always fall short by sin, but Peter isn’t talking about our common weakness to sin. He is talking about the deliberate intention to sin:

Deliberately causing harm to someone or being careless with our words; Leading others away from Christ by our deceitful words and actions. Christ never did that, so we should strive to speak words of goodness and healing, like Christ did.

Two: Jesus “did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly” (v.23). So often, we try to play God, but we should leave so many things for God to do. St. Francis said to his brothers, on his deathbed, “I have done what was mind to do, may Christ now teach you what you are to do.” Christ does call each of us to do specific work, and we should ask ourselves, “What is

mine to do?” But, overall, Christ calls all of us to the same general work. Peter tells us that “What is mine to do?” is to love, to forgive, to strive for goodness even when suffering, ultimately, to follow Christ’s example. Jesus was content to place the judgment into God’s hands, and focus on the work that was his to do.

Three: Jesus “personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed” (v.24). So many times, our wounds keep us in sin or distant from God. We’re numb or checked out due to self-preservation or we “go astray like sheep,” who mindlessly wander. Because Christ suffered for us and with us, we can turn to our Shepherd and trust that Christ will guard us and lead us to do what is right. We “have been transformed through the work of Christ from a past life of sin so that we may live today as Christ lived”.<sup>2</sup> Christ mirrors for us a faith-filled life.

When Prince Philip goes to his mother and reads the newspaper article to her, they open a new chapter in their relationship. Prince Philip apologizes for not having faith in her and expresses his sorrow for the barbaric treatment she endured. Princess Alice shares that she was not alone, and that she had help at every step. She then asks, “How’s your faith? Prince Philip answers, “dormant.” “That’s not good,” his mother responds. “Let this be a mother’s gift to her child. The one piece of advice. Find yourself a faith. It helps. No, not just helps. It’s everything.”

Throughout our time of worship today, I’ve given you a lot of examples of living examples: Christ, the apostles

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<sup>1</sup> Upper Room, email devotional, April 30, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> *Feasting on the Word*, loc 14959.

creating community, our own faith community, our families, and the extended faith community, the body of Christ. Christ calls us to be a living example and to find places to live out Christ's example. There are places all around us. Christ calls us to live out our faith in every aspect of our lives. We are to create goodness and love in our work, our families, and communities. We respond to suffering and abuse like Christ responds. We seek to grow our faith, to rely on it and to trust God during the times of struggle. We do this because as Princess Alice said: "It's everything." Our faith is everything. Amen.