

If you've ever spent any amount of time around young children, you know that one of their favorite questions, if not their most favorite question, is, "Why?" Why are things the way that they are? Why do I have to do things this way? Why, why, why, why, why? And that's okay! That's how they learn. It's how they learn about their world and the way things work. And Christians, we are children of the heavenly Father, too. And I think we ask him the same question just as often. Why, O Lord, why do you want me to do this and not that, especially when doing this is going to cause me all kinds of problems? Why do you want me to live this way, Lord? Why do you want me to do these things? Why, why, why, why, why? We want to know, too. We want to understand why God would have us live the way that he wants us to live. And that's okay. We can figure that out, because we need to know.

Christians, Peter is doing the same thing here in our reading for this evening. He is answering this question of "Why?" Why do we have to live the way that we live? And in fact, Peter goes on to say, just like God does so often in the New Testament, there's really two answers to that question. We live this way, Peter says, because of who Jesus is and because of who we are in Jesus. And we also live this way, Peter says, because the time is quickly coming to an end. And so those two things together answer this question for us of why we live the way that we live as Christians.

So let's look at our reading, starting at verse one, chapter 4. "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking." So Peter is giving us the first reason here. We live this way because this is who we are in Jesus. And notice what he's doing here as he lays this all out. He says, Jesus suffered for us. Now we heard about that last week when Jesus was suffering all of the things that he did on our behalf. He suffered in front of the Jews. He suffered on the cross. He did all of these things for us, right? Peter says, because Jesus has suffered, and because you have suffered with him and suffered in him, you're becoming like him in everything. The more and more we become like Jesus, the more and more we start to think like him. Because everything that has happened to Jesus, Peter says, also happens to us. Jesus suffered, and we suffer with him. Jesus was crucified, as Paul says, and we have been crucified with him. Jesus died, and we have died with him in Baptism, as Paul says in Romans chapter 6. And because Jesus lives, we will also live with him. Everything that happens to Jesus happens to us too, so that in everything we are being made more and more like him.

Now, that's not just an accidental thing, as if it happens only sometimes or only when we need it the most. If we are being made like Jesus, we become like him in everything. We start to think like him. We start to act like him. We start to do everything that he does too. This is what Peter means when he says, "Arm yourselves with the same way of thinking." Because we are united with Jesus, we start to do everything that Jesus did, in everything that we do and at every point in our lives.

Now, with that, Peter says, because we are becoming more and more like Jesus, that means that we are becoming less and less like the world. Because look at what the Gentiles are doing, Peter says in verse three. "For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry." In all of these things, Peter is saying, you're not doing what the world is doing. But that leads us to a question, a very serious question. If someone were to come up to you right now and compare

your way of living with the way of the Gentiles, the way of the world, could they tell the difference? Would they know that you belong to Jesus simply because of the way that you act and think and speak? Because if they can't tell the difference, Christians, if they're not able to distinguish between you and the world, that's a real problem. Because the way of the world is going to lead into judgment. That's the only place that they're going to end up. And so if we are thinking like them up, if we're acting like them, if we're doing all the things that they are doing, we will suffer the same judgment as them. Because look at what Peter is saying here. He says the Gentiles are "living in sensuality and passions." What does he mean by that? That sensuality, that living for my feelings, living for who I am and the way things make me feel. You only live once. You might as well live it up. I just like the way that the world makes me feel, and that's the way I want to live. The Gentiles do it, because, well, they don't have anything else going for them. But do we do it, too? Peter says they live for "drunkenness." They're living for abusing the things that God has given, so that they're no longer clearheaded in the way of their thinking, but simply living for that moment. Peter says they live for "orgies and drinking parties," complete lawlessness, to live simply for the moment. And finally, even for "lawless idolatry," to lift all of this up and to say "This is my God." Because you only live once, so you might as well enjoy it while you're here. If that's the way we're living, Christians, that's a real problem, because there is no difference between that and what the world is doing.

But if, as Peter says, if they can tell the difference between the two, if they know that you are a Christian because of the way that you are living and acting, then the world will hate you for it. The Gentiles will malign you, because you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery. You're going to suffer for it the same way that Jesus suffered for it. But rejoice in that! Because Jesus will judge them. They will have to answer for their lawlessness. They will have to answer for the things that they have done. But Jesus will bring you to himself in that moment. So Peter is telling us, leave all that behind! That's not who you are. You belong to Jesus, and for that reason, Peter says, let us live like we belong to Jesus.

But that all being said, he goes on then to the second reason, in verse seven. "The end of all things is at hand." We live in this way, Christians, because the end is quickly coming. Jesus is going to return quickly and without warning, and so that means for us that we need to be ready. We need to be ready for him to come. Now, how do those two work together? Why does Jesus returning quickly mean that we need to live a certain way? Let me put it this way. Maybe this will help you understand. If you are expecting someone to show up to your house, you know that they're coming, what do you do? Do you sit around and do nothing, so that when the company finally arrives, you don't even have supper ready, and you're just completely embarrassed by your lack of preparation? Or do you get ready? Do you clean? Do you pick up the house? Do you cook? Do you get everything in order so that when they arrive you are ready for them? Obviously we do the second one, right? We want to be ready for someone who is coming. But now, if you know when they are coming, the exact hour, of course, you could probably wait until you're a little closer to it, so then you can get ready. But if you don't know when they're coming, if you only know that they are, but you don't know the exact time, you have to be ready now. You have to get ready right away, so that whenever they show up, if it's immediately or a long time from now, you will be ready for them in that moment. Christians, that's what it means for us too. Jesus is coming soon. We don't know exactly when. He hasn't told us, but he has told us to

be prepared, to live as Christians that we have been called to be and to be ready for his arrival, so that when he comes, we will not be caught by surprise.

Now, how do we do that? Peter explains, verse seven. "The end of all things is at hand. Therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers." Self-control, not living like the Gentiles where you just do whatever because it feels good. But sometimes even denying ourselves, even the pleasures of this life, knowing that when Jesus returns, we will get something far better. We are not living in sin. We are living as people who belong to God, and for that reason, we can pick up our cross and follow him. We are also sober-minded, not blinded by all of the pleasures of this life, by all the things of this world has to offer, but clear-headed so that when Jesus returns, we're not going to be distracted. But we will be ready for him in all that he does. Peter goes on to say, "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins." We will be ready for him together as the body of Christ, loving one another as Jesus has first loved us. And that means putting up with all of our little faults, putting up with all of our little sins that cause little squabbles among us. Not insisting on our own way, but being patient with one another, loving one another, taking care one another. Because when we do that, we are acting like our Father. "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling." Welcome one another. We all belong to the same body, to the same family. So why not welcome each other as the part of that family just as Jesus has welcomed us? Now, don't do that with grumbling. Don't do that just because you have to. But just as Jesus first showed us love and showed us hospitality, love one another, so that we may be built up together. "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." Don't use your gifts just for your own self, to make yourself look impressive or to build yourself up. But use that gift for your neighbor, for the body of Christ, so that together as that body we may go forward towards Jesus. And finally we do all of these things, Peter says, that God may be glorified in everything through Jesus Christ. When we live as Christians together as his body, everything that we do in this life and in the life to come will be to his everlasting praise and glory. We will give God thanks in what we say and think and do, because God has given us everything in his Son Jesus Christ.

So yes, the time is coming quickly, Christians. So we are called to live like it is coming quickly, by showing that same love that God showed to us toward one another. So yes, let us live this way. Not like the world and the way that it lives, with its sins and living simply for the pleasures of this world. No, that's not who we are called to be. Everything that we are in Jesus shows that we are part of a different way, a way that leads ultimately toward life. So Christians, we live this way because of Jesus. We are in him to everlasting life. So turn away from the things of the world, and turn towards him, because he will not fail to deliver us.

In Jesus' name. Amen.