

**Based on 1 Peter 3:13-22**  
**Sixth Sunday of Easter**

*Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you-- not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.*

It's been my experience that, in general, people manage to "do good," on a broad scale, most of the time. Most people I know support charities, do a little volunteer work; they don't steal or use violence to solve their problems. They're good neighbors and citizens, who generally follow the law. If you think about it, a complex society just wouldn't function if most of its members weren't cooperative most of the time.

Where we tend to run aground is in "doing good" on the small scale. Maybe we fib a little in order to get a day off work or avoid a difficult conversation, maybe we pretend to not see our chatty neighbor as they walk up the street. Maybe we don't give someone a lift even when it isn't out of our way or make excuses to get out of helping a friend with an unpleasant task.

Sometimes it's our biases or assumptions that get in the way of "doing good." When we judge a panhandler because of the color of our skin, or we are dismissive of the needs of those who don't look like us or who don't vote the way we do, or who practice a different religion. Maybe we desire to drink deeply of all that life has to offer and we give in to temptations that hurt those around us or ourselves.

It is a truism that it is easier to love "people" than loving a particular "person." Abstract "people" are just easier to deal with than a cranky neighbor, a difficult co-worker, or a demanding spouse.

But from the beginning what has set the followers of Jesus apart from others is an insistence that doing good on the small scale is just as, if not more, important than doing good on the large scale. That's the lesson of the parable of the sheep and the goats where Jesus reminds us that the way we treat the "least of these" in our daily lives matters. It's the lesson Jesus teaches when he tells us not to act as the hypocrites do, and it is what Peter is driving at here.

Jesus has shown us that there is a different way, a better way, where we can, in all humility, but also with all confidence, be bold enough to be God's agents of love in a world filled with fear and hate. And we can love boldly, because through our baptism we have been given a tremendous, though undeserved, gift – the promise that the truth of our existence extends beyond our mortal life; that God's final word for us is not death, but abundant life.

Jesus invites us to grab hold of that abundant life in the here and now and to see those we encounter as He does, as creations of God, made in God's image, worthy of dignity; as children of God for whom redemption is always possible.