

“Sunday and Monday”

I Peter 3:8-12; Matthew 5:1-2, 9-12; Psalm 34:1-3, 11-14, 19

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1st Presbyterian Church of Sharon

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I. Introduction

Sunday and Monday, God and life, faith and work; what is the connection? Or perhaps the question is, is there any connection?

“My Sunday experience had no connection to my Monday world. The words that came to me from the Bible and the pulpit made no sense to me in my weekday world.” (p.10). So begins William Diehl in his book, *The Monday Connection*. Diehl continues: “The gap between the rhetoric of what the church was saying on Sunday and the reality of what was happening in my life on Monday was enormous. For a number of years I accepted the fact that I lived in two worlds, the Sunday world of religion and the Monday world of secularism. The church gave all types of direction in how to live out my faith by singing in the choir or volunteering on a committee or donating to a mission. All good things. But there was very little direction in how to live my faith at work, in my family, or with friends. I came to see that as a problem. And I came to strongly believe there is a connection between Sunday and Monday.” (pp. 12-13).

William Diehl was the sales manager for Bethlehem Steel for 32 years, a WWII vet, and active in his Lutheran Church. He wrote the book *The Monday Connection* in 1991. That is almost 35 years ago. A lot has changed. And I know here at 1st Church we talk a lot about the Sunday-Monday connection. But I still think the question is a good one: “What’s the connection between Sunday and Monday?” Maybe you asked that question also.

II. Review Context and Scripture Reading

The connection between Sunday and Monday has been a central theme in I Peter. The theology seeks a balance between faith and works, belief and action, believing in Jesus, and following the way of Jesus. And you seek that balance on Sunday AND Monday.

Furthermore we have seen that the recipients of this letter called I Peter were dealing with local harassment and persecution. This wasn’t the Roman government persecution of Christians to come that would lead to arrests and martyrdom. Rather this was local persecution as a result of the Christians living a different way than those around them. The Christians were a minority whose faith and way of life separated them off from pagan religions and festivals on Sundays and Mondays. So the Christians were subject to harassment, bullying, injustice, loss of jobs, snide comments, picking on your kids, and arbitrary unfairness.

And so, interestingly, I Peter is not about separating off from the difficulties of the harassment. It's not about retreating and forming a community of fellow believers on 40 acres in the mountains. Rather I Peter is about the importance of the faith and the church community for encouragement, and then living out that faith in all the challenges and particularities of life. It's faith and works, Sunday connected to Monday.

Over the past few Sundays we have seen there has been direction given to slaves who have become Christians, wives who have become Christian, and husbands who have become Christian. But what if you are not a slave, a wife, or a husband? Well, the reading today is for everyone else (and Christian slaves, wives, and husbands, also).

Read I Peter 3:8-12.

III. Brief Exegesis

The reading begins with "And finally," and that signals the conclusion of discussion on Christian faith relationships with non-Christians. After addressing Christian slaves, wives, and husbands, the discussion moves to how the Christians relate to each other and to the majority of non-Christians in their communities: the neighbor, the teacher, the shop keeper, the Roman soldier.

The way of their life together in the church is to be driven by unity, sympathy, love, and humility. And interestingly, all of those qualities were valued by the Greek culture all around them. Though they are Christians and not pagans, the way of their life together is to model the highest values of Greek life together. That is a great witness to a majority culture that harasses you because you are different. It's a way to live out your faith together in the way of Jesus, and to get along in a culture that has real questions about your beliefs.

The way of Jesus; it was more than believe and go to heaven. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was believed to show God's way in the world, a way to begin to live in the coming kingdom of God, the way to "pick up your cross and follow Jesus" (Mk. 8:34). Unity, sympathy, love, and humility were to describe the nature of their life together on Sundays, so that they were strengthened and encouraged as they lived out their faith in the challenges of harassment on Mondays. The way of Jesus was to be their way. And it's no mistake that Christianity was first called "the Way," the way of Jesus. And that is to be the way of all Christians in the church.

So what about the rudeness, the harassment, the injustice, and the bullying? When that comes up what were Christians to do? It was a real thing and a real question for the first 300 years of Christian faith. Communities were pagan and the vast Roman Empire moved in the direction of declaring the Caesar a god. Christians were different. They believed in the one God (and it was not Caesar), and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ proved that he was the Son of God, the Christ, the Savior. And so persecution was real. In the 4th C when Constantine made Christianity the official state religion in order to unify the Roman Empire, things changed. Christians were no longer persecuted. And sadly Christians, armed with the

power of the state, began to become the persecutors. But not in the early days. Believing and living the Christian faith could make you a target. So what to do?

In short, Christians were exhorted to practice nonretaliation. They were not to return evil for evil or abuse for abuse. Their faith on Sunday led them to a particular way of life on Monday. We hear echoes of the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount reading from Matthew 5: “blessed are those who are persecuted for their faith, blessed are those who are persecuted by false and evil accusations, blessed are those who hold fast to their belief in Jesus even though it brings hardship.” And the conclusion of Paul’s ethical section in Romans 12 ends with: “Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good (Rm. 12:30). Not retaliating with violence and evil is a theme that runs through the Bible.

I think at least two things are going on here. First there was the belief that the creator God established a type of “flow” to life. The “flow” is the will of God. And so when people live in that “flow” they experience a type of blessing from God: peace, joy, hope, love. That doesn’t mean that life is perfect. There is no protective bubble or “yellow brick road” for Christians. Bad things do happen to good and faithful people. But by living in the will, or the “flow” of God, and by not getting sucked into the darkness of evil, your life remains open to the presence and power of God.

I think that’s what Psalm 1 is about in our Call to Worship. It’s a wisdom Psalm. And it announces the wisdom and blessing of those who “don’t follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path of sinners, or sit in the seat of scoffers, but their delight is in the law of the Lord”...the “flow of God.” “They are like trees planted by streams of water, who make it through the dry seasons, and yield fruit in the seasons of life” (Ps. 1:1-3). Retaliation and being sucked into evil takes you out of the “flow” of God in the world.

The same theology is cited in Psalm 34 which the writer in I Peter quotes: “Those who desire life and good days keep their tongues from evil, don’t lie, turn away from evil, do good, and seek peace. And their lives and prayers are open to the power and presence of God.” (I Pt. 3:10-12 and Ps. 34:11-15). So first, there’s “God’s flow” in creation and life.

Second, there is simply the way of Jesus. Faced with harassment, false charges, misunderstanding, betrayal, false arrest, injustice, and even death, he did not retaliate, he did not waver, he did return evil for evil. Rather he trusted in the power and presence of God. He trusted in the “flow” of God in this world. And so Christians who are persecuted are to follow a similar way.

Now I could be wrong, but I don’t think it means “be a doormat.” I don’t think it means “don’t defend yourself.” I don’t think it means “just put up with the nonsense people may want to shovel on you.” Rather I think it means to have a soul shaped by Christin faith and the Holy Spirit so that you “choose the high road.” Rather than getting drawn into evil reactions, live with truth, justice, peace, and hope. In that way your heart and life stay open to the power and presence of God.

IV. Brief Theological Reflection

So it's not the 1st C. This is not Asia Minor. And Christians are not directly facing persecution simply by believing and living out their faith. At least not often. So what does this text have to say us?

One thing I think it says we already know; Sunday is connected to Monday (and Tuesday, and Wednesday). What we believe is connected to how we live every day. Christianity is not just believing in Jesus, it's also living in the way of Jesus. And we do that together as a church, and as individual followers in our families, our places of employment, our checking out at the grocery store when the person in front of us is slow, and when the server at a restaurant is not having a good day. Sunday is connected to Monday.

Of course we don't always get it right. We make mistakes. Our lesser selves have a way of finding a voice and directing a choice every once in a while. That's why we confess our sins, trust God's forgiveness, and try again. And we recognize those mistakes can often be the Holy Spirit whispering to our souls. And it keeps us humble.

The other thing I think about is how to live in a non-Christian culture. The exhortation from I Peter does not encourage fences and walls and boundaries. It doesn't encourage separation off from non-Christians and non-Christian culture. Rather it encourages being a Christian in that culture. It encourages living the way of Jesus with humility, love, unity, and peace. It encourages not being drawn into the darkness and the shadows and the violence.

All this is not always easy. But what I've found helpful is to pay attention to my soul. I don't think it's "too churchy" to say that. It's about self-awareness and what I'm feeling in my heart. If I'm angry, anxious, hopeless, or impatient, I try to pay attention to that and ask why. What I've found is that I need to not get drawn into some things. I want to pay attention to what's happening in our community and the world, but I don't want to get drawn into the angry politics and the hate of others. And I certainly stay disconnected from most social media. I want to fill my life with things that build up, not tear down. And I usually find that happens one choice, one person, one situation at a time. Commitment to worship and church life together and an active spiritual life help with that. So how might you take care of your soul?

As I was wondering about and imagining this text from I Peter, an old commercial came to mind. It was meant to sell a hamburger and a restaurant, but it also became cultural statement. Here's the commercial:

"Where's the beef?" It's a question about what really matters; bun or beef?

Christian faith is not primarily about bumper stickers, or how many Bibles you have, or the length of your Christian music play list. That's the bun. The "beef" is faith in the risen Jesus as Lord and Savior and a commitment to live in the way of Jesus. And we live that Sunday AND Monday. That's "the beef." It's always been "the beef." And it will always be "the beef."