

1 PETER 3:18

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

Suffering is an inevitable part of our lives. Peter is writing to suffering communities, people who are experiencing significant hardship because of their faith in Christ. Their courage and vulnerability during this exile, Peter seems to suggest, is not just a sign of their faith in Christ, but follows the model of Jesus' example of the Cross.

Being a Christian has never offered an escape from suffering. Jesus' death and resurrection doesn't exempt us from painful experiences, from feeling rejected or lost. It doesn't stop bad things happening to us. We will be injured, we will grieve, we will be humiliated. Ultimately we will die. What Jesus has done for us does not guarantee us a pain-free life.

But what His death does do is open up the door to us knowing and experiencing God's blessing, even – sometimes most intensely and profoundly – amid suffering. What Christ's suffering on the Cross does offer is the intimacy of a God who loves us so deeply that He was willing to bear the pain we previously had to experience alone. What His resurrection does promise is eternal life with the Father, even throughout the reality of our temporal lives.

The most extraordinary thing is that God suffers this unimaginable pain for us, whilst we were still His enemies. He is willing to die for us, even though we are the ones who rejected Him. As we continue to pray today for those five who are yet to come to Jesus, let's celebrate the fact that Christ has already died for them, already counts them as loved, and desires to be with them in their pain as well. We pray that they might be made alive by His Holy Spirit.

In this passage, Peter places suffering on a whole new, cosmic axis. What God has done for us reverberates around the whole universe, and yet is centred on one beaten, broken man. Later, Peter writes: *'You are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may be glad and shout for joy when His glory is revealed'*. Our sufferings are not trivial to the God who intimately knows suffering. But they are not final either. On the other side of suffering is victory. For what took place in Jesus takes place in us – death in the body but being made alive in the Spirit.

May those you know who are experiencing suffering today feel the arms of God comforting and guiding them. With God, suffering never has the last word.