

## **Not a Mumbling Word**

**By Rev. Sheryl Stewart**

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**Read Acts 17: 22-31, 1 Peter 3: 13- 22, and John 14: 15-21**

More and more as each year unfolds, conditions seem to worsen.

Intolerance, wars, and terrorism spread, pollution encroaches in every land, touching every ocean, and tyranny strives to become the face of patriotism. Plague and famine race like rabid horses of the apocalypse and, if another shoe drops, it is like as not to be a hobnail boot. We in America, who have rarely been genuinely oppressed, are increasingly more likely to suffer injustice.

Our first reaction to injustice is indignation and wrath; however, Peter counsels us to not fear the intimidation of suffering if we suffer for doing what is right. Prior to that counsel, in 1 Peter 2: 13-14, he says: “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority or to governors sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.”

Peter was very aware, in his age of persecution, that such kings and governors would not always be worthy of respect or even be reasonable. So, in 1 Peter 2: 18-20, he adds: “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But when you do what is right and suffer for it and patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.”

It is this very muteness in the face of the worst that evil can do which is most like Christ, who bore up even under separation from God so that we might be joined with Him to Heaven. I wish I could have located the old slavery spiritual which says, “Jesus spoke not a mumbling word.”

I can just imagine a slave getting order from the like of Simon Legree, nodding and saying clearly, “Yes, sir,” and then turning to leave for the task with a mumbled, “you picky son of a wolverine and a cross-eyed goat.” That would be a mumbling word; I have uttered them, but Jesus did not.

In his Mars’ Hill testimony, Paul spoke of how the Divine Nature cannot be expressed in silver or gold idolatry, but rather in the spirits of those who seek God’s way by following Jesus. Our Unknown God may only be made known in flesh and blood.

This brings me to the Gospel, in which Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Neither John nor Jesus is talking about a list of dos and

don'ts here. If we follow Jesus, live as He does, He discloses Himself to us – and that is the only way the world may come to see God. What way, then, is this?

It is not, as many would have it, an activist life of denouncing evil. It is not screaming in anger and sentencing Satan to the Hell he so richly deserves. It is not lifting the sword and chopping off the ears of the slaves who come to arrest our Lord. It is not even righteous complaint. Jesus spoke not a mumbling word. He accepted betrayal, even with a kiss. When He did say some words, those seven last words were not mumbled at all, and my favorite is, “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.”

The time will shortly come, if it has not come already, for us to face injustice and fight life's final war with pain. Please, let us not go with a mumbling word but rather testify to Him Who is alive in us. Amen.