**Exiles: Finding Hope While Scattered**

A Series on the Book of First Peter

Message 4 – “Is Mama Happy?” (1 Peter 3:1-7)

St. Paul’s United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown

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When I was growing up, the kitchen table was a sacred place. Sure, it was a place where we wolfed down breakfast in the morning rush to get ourselves to school. And it was the place where we spread out our homework on late night study sessions. And it was where we’d gather for card playing when my aunts and uncles would come over on a Friday or Saturday night. But when it was dinner time – especially on Sundays – my family would gather around the table and we would do life together. We’d talk --- except, of course, when my brothers and I were teenagers. Then we would grunt or argue. But mostly, it was a place where we shared life’s journey with each other.

Oh, we had our issues too. We’d have our disagreements – and all-out fights. We lived through teenage drama. And young adult drama too. And we lived through the pain of loss and the joys and challenges of transitions, as well. It was at that kitchen table that we planned my grandmother’s funeral as well as cut my graduation party cake. It was where we brought dates to meet the parents... and ultimately, fiancés to greet the family. It was where pasta was served in abundance, and where empty seats were filled with total strangers who were in need of help.

The kitchen table was a sacred place.

And when life happened and we all scattered in different directions, the kitchen table became the place that echoed those voices of the life that we shared. On holidays or special celebration days, when asked what gift my mom and dad wanted, their response was always the same: “Our gift,” they’d say, “is having the family together. That’s what would make us happy.”

The kitchen table is the place where love is whispered among memory echoes, long-practiced glances, playful poking and story-telling to the next generation of kids and grandkids. Each time I’ve had the opportunity to return to that family kitchen table, I’ve watched my parents smile that knowing smile – the one that says, “it’s good to have the family together.”

Having the family together... That’s what makes Mama happy. And Papa too. But I learned a long time ago... that “**If Mama ain’t happy, then no one is happy**.”

There’s a lot that I could share about today’s Bible passage from 1 Peter. Like last week, it too is challenging – and for some, controversial. While last week Peter talked about submitting to those in authority over us, as difficult as that was, this week he talks about wives submitting to husbands. Don’t you just envy me?

Well, in truth, there IS a lot that I could share that actually puts this passage into perspective. Good stuff. Sacred stuff. And perhaps one day we’ll go into all of those details. But for our purpose today – within this series called, “Exiles: Finding Hope While Scattered,” – I want to share just a couple of lessons from Peter’s words – in order to speak hope into our homes during this season of quarantine and pandemic.

But to start, I’d like to read the passage to you – and then pray. Here’s Peter’s words from 1 Peter 3:1-7...

*Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, 2when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.3Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. 4Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. 5For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, 6like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. 7Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

Will you pray with me? ---- Lord, open us up to Your Word and open Your Word up to us. Teach us what you would have us learn as You conform our lives into the disciples You have called us to be. In Jesus’s Name. Amen.

Okay... so let’s jump in. The first and most important lesson that Peter is trying to teach us in this passage is this: **The love shared in the Christian home is the single most important testimony for Jesus that we can offer to our unchurched neighbors.**

You know, if I were Peter’s literary agent, I’d probably coach him to change the way he’s trying to make his points. In fact, if he were writing this letter in today’s world, within our American culture, he’d be raked over the coals by social media – probably before his letter made its way into the destination church to which it was written.

But that’s the point. As with other passages like this in the New Testament, we often read this passage defensively rather than with curiosity. When we read it defensively, his words offend us because it pushes against our strong sense of egalitarianism. We still live in a male-dominant, patriarchal society and women are constantly challenged to be on the defensive, or offensive.

But when we read this passage with curiosity, we might discover that Peter is actually elevating women to a place of importance that was nothing less than radical in his culture and in his day. And the place that he was elevating women to is a sacred place. A place at the table – the table of discussion, the table of decision, the table of honor... and the table of Christ-centered love and grace. If we look deeper into his words – words shared within the language of his culture – we’d discover that Peter was actually teaching that early church that women needed to be respected... in fact, honored.

Why? Because in Jesus Christ, there’s a new rulebook that needs to be followed. And in that new rulebook there are only two rules – and both of those rules are non-negotiable:

* Rule #1 is **we are to love each other – with the kind of love that gives one’s life for another**. It’s the self-sacrificial love that we saw modeled by Jesus Himself. It’s the kind of love that submits willingly – both to those who are over us (regardless of their character – since our identity and security come from Jesus), as well as to those who sit at the table with us – like husbands and wives. **Love is the language of the Kingdom of God** and we need to master that language. We need to speak it fluently. Why? Because of Rule #2...
* Rule #2 is that **our witness for Jesus is more important than anything else**. That’s our mission. That’s our purpose. We were saved for a reason and we were given a purpose. That purpose must become more important than anything else. Peter’s telling us that how we treat each other in our homes shows others who Jesus is. Think about this. As our neighbors, co-workers, friends, relatives, coaches, teachers --- as they see us interact with each other, they get a picture of who Jesus is. How we treat each other in our homes tells others about how much Jesus can actually change our lives. And what they see either opens doors for faith... or shuts them.

So, to help us get our home in alignment with Rule #1 and Rule #2, Peter talks with wives and husbands about submitting to one another.

When we read that word “submit” defensively, we make the mission of the church all about us. But when we read that word “submit” with curiosity, we discover that Peter’s actually not diminishing the role and responsibility of women... but rather elevating them above the way they were viewed by his culture back then... and giving them equal status with men in the eyes of God. In fact, in verse 7, Peter calls them “**heirs**” with their husbands for “**the gracious gift of life**” that God has for them. He’s just using familiar language and practices to do so.

The other thing that Peter does to honor women – and the home – is that he calls out the husbands.

In verse 7, he writes...

***7Husbands****,****in the same way*** *be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect* ***as the weaker partner*** *and* ***as heirs with you*** *of the gracious gift of life,* ***so that******nothing will hinder your prayers****.*

Notice a few things here:

First, Peter says again, “**in the same way**.” This is so important to understanding this passage. By that phrase, Peter is saying again that both husbands AND wives bear EQUAL responsibility for submitting to one another, equal responsibility in showing honor to one another, and equal partnership in the witness that their marriage has in pointing people to Jesus Christ.

Then Peter dives into the deep end of the discussion. In verse 7, he writes the phrase, “*husbands...as you live with your wives*.” The word translated as “live with” in Greek is the word *synoikeo* – and it was especially used in the context of sexual relations (Deut. 22:13; 24:1; 25:5). So, Peter is talking about sex here. [No worries... we’re not going to get beyond a ‘G’ rating here.] What Peter is saying to husbands is this: “Guys, the culture you live in is accustomed to you using and abusing women. But you serve a different Lord. You need to get your act together and you need to respect the women in your life. You need to honor them. Especially in the bedroom. You need to honor them by not forcing yourselves on them, not demanding your own way.”

In fact, he goes one step further... He says, “be considerate” of them (NIV) – literally, “understand your wives.” Peter is saying, “Guys, seek to understand your wives.” Women, can I get an “Amen!”

So, what’s with the phrase, “**the weaker partner”**? There is clear evidence by the original words that he’s using that he’s referring specifically to physicality – namely, he’s saying, “Guys, don’t force yourselves on your wives. Be aware that you are bigger and broader than they are.” Now, I don’t know if all men were bigger than all women back then, but the principle behind what Peter is saying concerns them not dominating over women, not bullying them, not abusing them.

So, let’s apply this. How do we get everyone around the kitchen table?

Wives and husbands and submitting---- if the issue of submitting comes up in a relationship, it’s probably because we’re forgetting what love is all about. Genuine love nurtures --- it seeks to meet each other’s needs. It seeks to willingly care for one another. Submission, like love, is something that we give away freely.

* A husband who demands that his wife submits is addressing the wrong issue – and the wrong person.
* A wife that feels she must “submit” because she is afraid of her husband’s response is not addressing the right issue – or the right person.
* If each, husband and wife, are focused on being the person transformed by the love of Jesus, and we treat one another out of that transformed love – we don’t ever have to talk about submission because we’re living it out.

**Submission is a choice – based on a desire to give one’s life to another person for a larger reason, a larger witness.** (for full explanation listen again to last week’s sermon)

Unfortunately, there are way too many women who are abused by men – physically, sexually, mentally, emotionally and spiritually – using these Bible verses and others like it to justify their abuse. Statistically, that is between 4 – 6 million women per year.

I’ve got to be honest. That statistic makes me sick. It makes me sick that we have become a society that tolerates such abuse. Yes, I said, “tolerates.” A statistic of 4-6 million women per year??? That shows that we as a society are dealing with another pandemic of grander proportions. Every one of those women is someone’s daughter – and possibly someone’s mother, sister, or friend. They may be people who come to church with you, or who sit next to you at work. They may be in your class at school, or they may be the head of the local PTO. This statistic needs to disturb us and call us to respond. There is no excuse for that kind of treatment of women – or children, or anyone.

In fact, I believe that any man who bullies or abuses any woman – or bullies or abuses any child – or any employee – or any person --- is simply not a man. Rather, he is an insecure, hurting little child that is projecting his hurt onto others in an attempt at validating his own existence. That person is NOT living out Peter’s words here at all.

“Submission,” according to Peter, is not about putting up with abuse. Submission is a choice to honor. If there’s no choice, there’s no submission.

Abuse and dishonor are the opposite of what Peter is talking about in his letter. We need to make honoring one another in the home one of our top priorities during this season of exile.

Often, it’s Mama that sets the tone of the home. **If Mama ain’t happy, then no one is happy**.

God restores us when we honor Him.

So, let’s apply this with a challenge for the week.

If you’re married, look for a way to show honor to your spouse – to put them first

If you’re a kid, look for a way to serve your parents – to show honor to them

If you’re a parent, look for a way to bless your children – to pour into them honor

If you’re single – never married, widowed, divorced – prayerfully ask yourself, “How can God best honor you? What are you needing from God?” Then, ask God for that.

If you’re a young person who is dating someone that is abusing you, you need to leave them immediately. They are not the person that God has in mind for you. You, yourself, are not going to be the one to change them. Only God can do that. But you were designed for something better.

God never wastes anything. So, let’s not waste this pandemic either. Let’s take advantage of the opportunity we have to honor God by seeking out ways to honor one another in the home. Let’s make Mama happy.

Will you pray with me.... Lord, thank you for the kitchen table and how you draw us all together in the expressions and celebrations of love. Father, I pray that you would pour your Holy Spirit into every person and every family within this church – so that our homes may not only be places of safety and nurturing love, but also will show others the love of Jesus. Thank you for that love, Lord. In Jesus’s name. Amen.