

*13Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? 14But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, 15but 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;*

*16yet 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. 17For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil.*

*18For 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, 19in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, 20who 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.*

*21And 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, 22who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.*

How many of you have ever driven or ridden or walked over Heider Creek? Raise your hands high.

Now how many of you have driven or ridden or walked by the Avon Lake High School?

If you raised your hand once you should have raised your hand twice. Heider Creek flows through the Avon Lake High School property. Traveling north on Highway 83 you pass a sign that says Heider Creek. I must have passed that sign thousands of times but until this week could not have told you what the name of that creek was. I think my attention was always somewhere else – on the color of the stoplight ahead or the message sign at the high school or cars or people or the high school building but not on that sign right before my eyes.

Peter writes: “Keep your conscience clear.” Pay attention to that sense of right or wrong within you. Do not drive right by it with never a glance. Take time to notice what makes you uneasy about you. If there is something you get defensive about – that you find yourself making excuses about – stop for a moment – be still – ask God about it. It may be that you need to change something that you are doing or failing to do.

Keep your conscience clear. If you find yourself very critical of others – focused in their failings this is also a sign that it is time to look within yourself. God did not put you in charge of your neighbor but in charge of you. If it seems to you that someone else needs to change before you can be what you should be take a step back and ask

yourself what you can do so that at the end of each day others are not causing you to do this or that but that you are choosing how you will live.

Keep your conscience clear. This is good advice but it is not the last word. Some people are convinced that they are always in the right. Even as they are hurting or harming others their conscience never bothers them at all. For all I know Hitler may have had a clear conscience. Or maybe when I say that I do there may be people I am sinning against that are as invisible to me as was that sign for Heider Creek. God does not see things the way that you and I do – it is not our conscience but God who will speak the last word. That is why after he has spoken about keeping your conscience clear Peter writes: “Christ also suffered for sin once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.” Whether your conscience is clear or troubled your hope is the same – that Jesus Christ has taken away your sin in his dying and rising. Not your clear conscience but Jesus will save you. He suffered once for all - for all people for all sins. Not only you can find hope in him but everyone with a clear or troubled conscience can find hope in him. Every unrighteous one can be saved by Jesus.

Before long, weeds will be everywhere. Each evening I can go out and pull them and with each new day there will be more weeds. Sin is like that – pluck it out today and tomorrow it sprouts anew. Heeding Peter’s word about keeping our conscience clear – really focusing on that word could keep you and I busy for the rest of the moments God gives us on earth. If we really focus on keeping our conscience clear we might miss out on loving our neighbors. You could spend your whole life pulling weeds – Christ suffered for sin once for all to free you and me from focusing on ourselves – to free us for our neighbors.

But if your conscience is telling you that you are sinning against your neighbor it is time to pay attention. Back in my seminary days a professor taught us that Lutherans believe in the remission of sins – not the permission of sins. What you do does matter. Feed a hungry person and that person will have reason to give thanks to God. Lose yourself in anger or gambling addiction or in pornography or in being judgmental of others and we all lose out on what God might accomplish through you.

Keep your conscience clear.

And trust that everything depends on Jesus. Amen.