

*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.*

I've never taken lifesaving. But they tell me that there is nothing more difficult to do than to rescue a drowning person. He is desperate; he grabs and claws, trying to climb from the water, pulling his rescuer under the waves with him. Unless the rescuer is skilled, two are lost, claimed by the waters, rescuer and rescued, both drowned.

We are redoing my daughter's room, he told me. "Some memories there. The hole in the wall made by the door knob after I slammed the door open after my daughter had slammed it shut." He is a quiet man, full of love, but in trying to rescue a daughter that he thought was drowning, he found himself being pulled down into the anger and shouting, struggling in the waters with her.

This is happening every day. Young girls marry men whom they sense are struggling in the waters of alcoholism. They marry believing that if they jump into the waters with this man

they love, they can pull him to shore. But soon words of love are turned into shouts of accusation, anger, hatred. Two are drowning instead of one.

We hope that we will be like Noah, on an ark riding above the waves. Let's get all whom we love on board with us. Even if all the others will drown, we'll be safe.

Maybe that is why we come to this place, to learn how to build an ark. When the storms come, when the world is drowning, God will save us. The waters will not touch us.

Eight persons were saved in Noah's day our second lesson reminds us. "And baptism, which this prefigured, saves you." That is what our second lesson says.

We say this in the prayer before a baptism. We pray, "By the waters of the flood you condemned the wicked and saved those whom you had chosen, Noah and his family."

Those whom God loves he keeps riding in that boat above the waters. But what of Jesus? Where was the ark for him?

When Jesus jumped into the waters to save all of we drowning sinners, what happened?

Did he lift us out of the waters one by one? Help us up on the boat where the storms will never touch us again? Keep us from the grasp and the clutching hands of the drowning?

When Jesus was on the cross, drowning under the hatred of his enemies, did God swoop down as a dove and lift him off the cross and up into the air?

Or did Jesus drown with thieves and robbers, pulled under the same waters that took life from all who sinned in Noah's day?

Our Lord refused to ride an ark until the storm was over while sinners drowned. He could not ignore the hands reaching out, the cries for help, the pleas for mercy. To save the good was not enough, and so as our second lesson says, Christ died, the righteous for the unrighteous. Christ died the holy one for the sinners, with the sinners. Christ died, God died, for the ungodly.

Christ died to bring us to God.

What is baptism like? Baptism is being drowned with the sinners, being crucified with Christ. Not climbing into an ark, but holding hands with the damned all the way to the bottom while believing in God.

For God raised Jesus from the dead, showing all the world that eight is not enough. God wants all of his children to be saved.

Our second lesson speaks of this in saying, "Christ was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison who 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."

Even those condemned in Noah's day, through Christ and his resurrection God is seeking to save.

Sometimes we think that the Christian life is about not getting wet. But our Christian life begins by being plunged into the flood in baptism, being called into the waters with the drowning. Being where Jesus is - loving as Jesus loves.

We are free to enter the waters. We are not afraid of drowning. For we know God has life prepared for us. Storms will come, the floods will rise. Christ will bring us through.

But only as through death.

The second lesson talks of suffering for doing good - being like Christ in this. When it happens to us we are always shocked - as if suffering is a sign the ark has sprung a leak.

God has not placed us on an ark. Down in the waters with Christ and our drowning brothers and sisters, we are like our dying Lord.

And we know that God will not fail us.