

What is Pasco? We know Pasco is the name of one of the tri-cities not so far from here. But Peter uses it repeatedly in this passage and I don't think he means one of the Tri Cities. Peter uses the word *πάσχω* 11 times in his first epistle, with 4 of those coming in 1 Peter 2:19–23:

¹⁹ Now, it is commendable if, because of one's understanding of God, someone should endure pain through *pasco* unjustly. ²⁰ But what praise comes from enduring patiently when you have sinned and are beaten for it? But if you endure steadfastly when you've done good and *pasco* for it, this is commendable before God.

²¹ You were called to this kind of endurance, because Christ *pascoed* on your behalf. He left you an example so that you might follow in his footsteps. ²² He committed no sin, nor did he ever speak in ways meant to deceive. ²³ When he was insulted, he did not reply with insults. When he *pascoed*, he did not threaten revenge. Instead, he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. ²⁴ He carried in his own body on the cross the sins we committed. He did this so that we might live in righteousness, having nothing to do with sin. By his wounds you were healed. ²⁵ Though you were like straying sheep, you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your lives.

Pasco means “to suffer”, but not all suffering is pasco. That's the riddle because suffering itself is not the only answer. Some suffering simply belongs to being human – like suffering illnesses, or aging and all the physical stuff that brings, grief, loss, the slow sorrow of watching someone you love decline – that is real and holy and human suffering. But it's not pasco.

And then there's the suffering that comes from sin. Like broken trust, cruel systems, violence, prejudice, the wounds we inflict on one another, grudges and abuse. Those experiencing these are also experiencing suffering – real suffering. But it is not pasco.

Peter describes pasco suffering as suffering because we belong to Christ. It is suffering that comes from following Jesus in a world that prefers domination over mercy. This is the suffering that Peter calls us to understand, endure and witness as followers of the way of Christ.

Peter wrote to Christians scattered across Asia Minor — what we would now call Turkey. They were a small minority that were not socially secure. They were mistrusted, slandered and called, “*aliens* and *exiles*.” They did not hold office or write laws. They did not command armies, or shape empire. Instead, they lived under the shadow of the Roman Empire where everything about living the way of Christ was challenged – even how they lived as families.

Rome was an empire built on military strength, hierarchy, wealth, and emperor worship. Caesar was proclaimed as lord and savior, the son of god. Into that world Peter instructed the churches in Asia Minor to “Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

Do you hear the order? Honor the emperor. But **fear only God**. Respect rulers but don't worship them.

This is where Peter becomes startlingly relevant for our times because the church has throughout the ages and is still today in danger when it confuses the Kingdom of God with the kingdom of the nation.

Peter says: “Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.” The Greek word for *example* is **ὕπογραμμός** here is the word for a child tracing letters or to underscore. As though Christ has written the alphabet of love before us, and we are invited to trace our lives over his. How did Jesus suffer? Peter tells us: “When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten.”

This is pacifism – not passivism. This is not a surrender to evil, but a third way that is neither violence nor acquiescence, neither fight nor flight. It is a refusal to become what harms us and a refusal to mirror evil. And THIS is the at the heart of pasco.

Few people embodied Peter’s vision in modern history more clearly than Martin Luther King Jr. King refused both violence and passive surrender. He called it **nonviolent resistance**; a third way; Jesus’ way. King said that accepting injustice passively is to cooperate with it and to answer violence with violence destroys community. So, he chose another way. Marching, praying, going to jail, receiving hatred without returning hatred. He understood Pasco.

He knew that following in the way of Christ might cost him everything, and in the end, it did. His witness reminds us that nonviolence is not weakness. It is moral courage; it is resurrection faith lived publicly.

Like King, our Anabaptist forebearers refused to take up arms against their oppressors thereby making a statement that evil is not overcome by the sword. Many of them paid for this conviction with their lives. The Martyrs Mirror is filled with prison letters and final testimonies from those who chose faithfulness over violence. They were imprisoned, exiled, drowned, burned, executed and yet again and again they quoted 1 Peter 2:21... “Follow in his steps.”

Pasco never means deliberately putting yourself in harm’s way, nor does it mean being a passive recipient to violence – in whatever form. If you are suffering from violence of any kind, the best thing you can do for yourself is to find somewhere safe. To endure suffering of Christ is done from a place of strength – strength of hope, strength of truth, strength of community surrounding you and strength of faith.

Instead, we have empathy. Empathy is not soft sentiment, but costly solidarity. It is allowing another’s pain to interrupt our comfort. Practicing empathy is refusing the sin of indifference.

Empathy is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is not simply a personality trait that some have and others do not. It is Spirit-born. When the Holy Spirit dwells within us, one of the ways that presence becomes visible is in our capacity to feel with and for others. The Spirit trains our hearts to notice what we would otherwise ignore. This is why empathy is so central to discipleship. It is how we participate in the life of Christ,

who did not remain distant from human suffering but entered fully into it. In Jesus, God does not observe pain from afar—God inhabits it. And through the Holy Spirit, that same movement becomes possible in us. We begin to see each other differently. We begin to respond differently. Not because we are trying harder, but because the Spirit is making us new.

And so, empathy becomes more than emotion—it becomes vocation. It becomes how we live as the body of Christ in the world. When one member suffers, all suffer. When one is burdened, others come close. This is not weakness. This is the very strength of the Spirit at work among us: binding us together, drawing us outward, and refusing to let suffering remain isolated or unseen.

To be a follower of Christ means that we, like Christ, walk alongside and uphold our neighbour when they are too weak to bear their burden alone. This is Christian witness in its finest and purest form. Presence. Solidarity. Mercy. Respect. Love.

Friends, this matters in our world today because wrath seems to undergird our every interaction. Tribalism, fear of the stranger, retaliation, contempt, entitlement, abuse of power and systems that reward dominance pervade even our churches and homes.

The temptation is always the same: fight power with power. But Christ offers another way - not surrender but witness. Love your enemies. Pray for those who harm you. Stand with the wounded. Refuse to dehumanize. Speak truth. Protect the vulnerable. And never surrender your soul to hatred. This is enduring suffering like Christ. This is Pasco.

Friends, may we never seek thrones, but seek only footsteps. And may the Holy Spirit form in us the gift of empathy— that we might not turn away from suffering, from Pasco, but enter it with Christ, for the sake of the world.

Amen.