

1 Peter 1:17-21  
Third Sunday of Easter  
April 23, 2023

I know some of you are lifelong residents of the area, having never moved more than a few blocks across town. Others arrived here from a long distance. You had to adjust to new schools and make new friends. There were differences in the climate, as well as traditions and customs to learn. Military personnel are well-known for making frequent moves. Called workers do a good deal of it also, although our experience these last two years would say that not enough did, or at least not the ones we called.

As the Apostle Peter addressed believers of the first century A.D. and us, he indicated we are on the move and only temporary, so

DON'T GET TOO COMFORTABLE HERE

- I. Live in fear of God
- II. Live as redeemed children of God
- III. Live with faith and hope in God

As we hear the call to live in fear of God we need to note that there are two kinds of fear. One could result from the opening verse which pointed out that God judges impartially. He is not fooled. He sees the heart and knows everything. Some things we think and do we try to keep from the view of others in order to maintain an image of being upright and decent people, but the Lord knows all of our deeds as well as the private thoughts and feelings we harbor. We point to positive features like family history or time we have served him but he sees through such facades also. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for their outward show of piety while their "hearts were far from him." So the thought of God's impartiality can be scary when we realize he sees similar flaws in our behavior.

We also know his standard: perfection. Who can measure up? Not one! Fear is proper for we deserve the guilty verdict. It is not a comfortable feeling that wells up within us.

There is another kind of fear, called "reverent fear" in this text. Luther's catechism speaks of it in the explanation of the First Commandment. "We should fear, love and trust in God above all things." This kind of fear means to respect or look up to. We have reason for this attitude toward God as we will note. This reverent fear values something as important. We regard it as special, like a family heirloom.

It is watchful and careful. We don't want to give him cause to disown us or turn away from us. We do not take our faith for granted and presume to have security, thinking that we can never fall from faith. We take our connection seriously and strive to maintain it.

It involves living as a stranger in this world. We will not be attached to it, taking our cues from the people who surround us but instead listening to God and his Word. We hold a much different value system. The attitude of this world is to live for yourself and what you can grasp. We recognize the temporary nature of all that we see and use now. We are just passing through. We have a bigger purpose and goals. We look to God for his standards of right and wrong, not opinion polls. We live reflecting love for him and his ways.

## II.

Because of what he has done we live as redeemed children of God. Again there is a difference. "You were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers." Many of Peter's readers were Gentiles who had formerly worshiped idols. Their many gods were often more like exalted humans, subject to the same excesses as we are. Philosophy was a love of the Greeks but much of it was idle speculation on the meaning of life that lacked answers.

Other recipients of this letter came from a Jewish background but their faith had become an empty shell that lost the meaning and focus on the true God and the promised Messiah.

As we think of forefathers, all of us have inherited sin. By nature we serve self. We were steeped in sin and slaves of Satan, which could only lead to hell.

God intervened and sent Jesus. "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." There is not enough wealth in the world to pay for sin. Achieving redemption is a human impossibility. God communicated through the Old Testament sacrificial system that blood was required for payment. The animals brought for sacrifice, especially the Passover lamb, had to be perfect physical specimens. A worshiper could not bring a critter that was sickly, wounded or an undesirable cast off of no use for his herd or flock.

Enter Jesus, God's own Son. He had lived a sinless life. He spoke no profanity and entertained no greedy thought. He was not selfish or vengeful. He was pure and holy. As God he could substitute for the world, that is, for everyone, for you and for me.

God planned it that way. "He was chosen before the creation of the world." Because he knows all, including the future, God was well aware of what his creation would do. Our first parents and everyone since then would sin and rebel against him but he still loved us and planned the solution, although at great personal cost. We are familiar with that plan after our recent trek through Lent and Holy Week. Jesus took our sins on himself even though he was innocent. He willingly bore the pain as he paid the awful price of suffering hell and the full fury of divine anger over sin. God did more than plan it. He carried it out to perfection. The world is redeemed.

Peter also wrote in a way that each of us can take personally. He pointed out the Savior "was revealed in these last times for your sake," and "through him you believe in God." Faith was produced in your heart by the Holy Spirit through the message about Jesus and his work. Even though it is God's doing and not ours, that faith receives the credit for all that Jesus did, both his holy life and his payment for sin. You and I are part of his family. Those who are born into a wealthy or privileged family might take for granted their status and benefits. They expect to have them. We were not born into the family of God even if we don't remember the time when we were outside of it. We were brought in by God's action. Cherish what he has done. Cling to his lifeline in faith. Oh, there are other routes to happiness that are offered but they lead to a dead end. Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life." No one comes to the Father except through him.

### III.

That's why Peter called us strangers. We are different. We often don't like to be viewed that way. We want to fit in with the crowd. Peter calls us not to get comfortable with the prevailing attitudes and actions of the world around us but to live with faith and hope in God. Our basis for confidence is Easter. Jesus not only offered the sacrifice but it was accepted. "Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God." Christ's resurrection was a demonstration of God's approval of his payment for sin. If he had not risen, we would have remained in our sins. The Bible declares, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." The message is clear. We are declared righteous and holy in God's sight.

The text referred to his being glorified. Gone was the state of humiliation in which Jesus had lived earlier. He was now in his state of exaltation when he resumed full use of his divine power and glory. There was his descent into hell, showing Satan and the demons there that he was alive and had conquered death, sealing their

doom. He now had a glorified body that was able to exit the tomb even before the angel came and rolled away the stone, was able to appear and disappear and to enter locked rooms. Forty days later he ascended to heaven, having completed his earthly mission. He now occupies the position of power at God's right hand, directing all that goes on for our benefit. We reign with him as everything is serving for our good. We may be strangers here but we are on a victory tour. Trust that it is true even when outward circumstances may not look like it, for remember that he is the victorious Lord of all.

We enjoy blessings in our connection with him. Peter mentioned faith, for it receives the benefits of forgiveness for all our sins, peace with God, joy in all circumstances and comfort in times of trouble, for we know that God's plans for us are always good.

We have hope. Christian hope is more than a wish. We live in joyful anticipation of each new day on earth and of heaven eternally. Our hope is certainty, not a mere iffy desire, for it is based on the completed work of Jesus. Sometimes questions pop up. We look at the direction the world or our nation is heading or at conditions in our personal lives. Our thoughts turn gloomy and overflow with despair. At those times lift your eyes to the risen Savior. Remember his victory. Know his power. Hear his promises. Keep turning to the Word, remember your baptism and how your sins were washed away and you became God's child. Receive the Lord's Supper with its personal message that your sins are forgiven. Grow in faith and be filled with hope.

Heaven is our real home so we are strangers here. However, we are not wandering aimlessly, lost and confused. Go hand in hand with Jesus, who guides and guards you. He has been here. He knows and understands the challenges of life in a sinful world. He won the victory for you. Live in it.

Be filled with reverent fear as redeemed children of God, filled with faith and hope. Your Savior lives and so will you. He is at your side. Meanwhile, trust his guidance, follow him in faith and serve him gladly.