

(This sermon print-out comes from various paragraphs of an essay on I Peter 1, that I presented at the Pastor and Delegate Conference at Watertown, SD, last week. I will be adding Pentecost thoughts to the material. Thank you.)

I PETER 1:1-2 PENTECOST ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE SCATTERED

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion—in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia—elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace be multiplied!

By background, Peter was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus called Peter to be a “fisher of men.” Peter followed. It is easy to think of Peter as being a rough-cut, bold, take-charge sort of guy. Scripture supports that. His epistle is indeed filled with practical directions for Christian life—perhaps the most obvious is Christian humility and submissiveness. Peter has been brought a long way from his, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” self-reliant days (Matthew 26:25). Peter’s style, however, is not plain and down-to-earth. Peter uses bigger words, and complex sentences. Some of that shows in English. (Always a surprise for me.) If Jesus can use a fisherman like Peter for great purposes, he can do the same with you.

The Apostle Peter (“apostle” is one “sent out”) served the Lord Jesus Christ. He wrote his first Epistle (“letter”) to Christians who were displaced in the Roman Empire, living in Roman provinces which we call Turkey today. They were enduring hardship, persecution, and trials—something we have a hard time grasping. Peter wrote to encourage them and keep them forging ahead in the name of the Savior from sin. He calls them “elect.” How encouraging! They have not been forgotten by God, but have been specifically “elected,” “chosen,” by God as part of His family and kingdom. They were not “comfy” back in their home neighborhood right now, but were strangers, pilgrims traveling forward. They were dispersed and scattered, a diaspora. (Have you heard of the CLC’s “Diaspora List,” a list of scattered members?) Whether scattered or not, have you ever felt as if a stranger? “Do I belong here? Will I make it here?” It is such a comfort to know your Savior who died for you and who rose in victory for you is watching. You have been pre-chosen by the Father—in spite of your record—as one whom the Holy Spirit would set apart—sanctify—leading you to cling to Jesus by faith (the “obedience” of faith, as Christ says “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” --John 6:29). In this Jesus you have been sprinkled by His atoning blood. You belong to the holy Father. God’s undeserved gift (His grace) and peace are yours in abundance! -- by the bucketsful—multiplied to you. Here’s encouragement when feeling lost and “jacked-around.”

For scattered strangers to have such status before God is great! Sprinkled before the Father with the peace-making blood of Jesus and to stand there secure. We praise Him who sent His Son in “poly-compassion” (poly equals “many, much,” --- as in mono-gamy, bi-gamy, poly-gamy), with the result that in Jesus’ resurrection from death for sin, you have new life! Have you ever experienced something akin to new life? I had a noxious wart on the index finger of my right hand. It was removed three times, but kept coming back. Finally a specialist lasered it out for good! It healed and new life! In Jesus you already have new life now, and will have it in full on Judgment Day. Stop dragging through the day, moping how bad you have it. In Jesus you have new life now in your soul before God—your disobedience forgiven!--and at The End new life to your bag of bones resurrected and reborn, ushered into the presence of God.

It’s an inheritance—not a purchase—an inheritance of the highest quality and quantity. Consider inheriting a jewel of a vehicle that has no rust, that will not rust, that runs great, and will continue to run great longer than you do! Your inheritance in heaven is “Reserved” for you—a special place, by name. No one else can take it. It is guarded and kept safe for you. It’s more than a reserved seat at a ballgame, or a rodeo. It’s in the great hall for the great crowd entering heaven. A place reserved for you!

Peter reminds his diaspora (scattered) pilgriming Christians that the salvation to come will bring a far greater joy than the grief of body and/or mind which they are currently enduring. In the grand scheme of things, their suffering really lasts but a short time and only as long as need be—nothing more. Isn’t that true of rough stretches in this life? When they are past, they seem short. Calving season, planting season, drought, blizzard, or a mother in labor. Luther describes life on this earth as a “Jammer-Tal”—vale of tears. The many heartaches, tears, sins, regrets, and guilt make it less than stellar. Trials come as need be. Whether sent by the devil to ruin you, or by the Lord as a cross, the Lord holds them all under His loving governing hand. He uses them for your good as you travel the road to heaven through faith in Christ. “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

Just as gold is tested and tried by fire, with the result that this smelting process purifies its contents, making it even more pure and valuable, so also the tough stretches which we endure in our diaspora pilgrimage make our faith (already more precious than perishable gold) even purer and stronger. Like the summer wind which makes the grain stand strong, and thus ready for even stronger winds, the Lord uses the tough stretches in life to lead us to rely on His merciful love and glorious rescue in Christ more and more and self less and less, until ultimately ready for death—in Christ. Training is less than enjoyable—whether basketball, homework, or learning to drive a ZTR mower—but it purifies the skill. It’s the same with training children: “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Proverbs 13:24). Thus when Christ is revealed at the End, a living faith, purified by the right amount of fire from the Lord, passes muster! to His praise and glory, not ours.

This Jesus, whom we love and in whom we rejoice, we have never seen! Sometimes it’s hard to be excited about a destination which you have never seen—like the child weeping as father drives past the park, because the destination is not just any park but Disney Park. By faith we know that our destination is going to be the best. “Thomas, . . . blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29). Faith itself is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Consider the joy of reaching the ultimate goal of our faith! Like the football player banging his way down the field finally crossing the goal line! Heaven—no more tears, sorrow, sadness, pain, death (Revelation 21:4).

What seems like a tough and impossible spot for you is not. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are at your side in every scattered pilgrimage of life. Get up, get tough, and get going in the role God has given you. In Bible times, men needed to “belt-up” their long flowing robes so as to free their legs for work, action, and battle. Peter says the Christian needs to gird up his head and heart, focusing on the gift to come. Mental toughness, toughness of the New Man, toughness of faith, is in order. Stop looking at the negative, and focus on the positive. The devil will keep pounding you day after day to give up the cause. He will lead you to fixate on the negatives, “Tsk! The Pastor, the Council, the people!” He will lead you to focus on the negatives in yourself, —“I can’t.” “I’m not. Get someone else.” Gird up the loins of your mind!

In your New Man in Christ, fight on! It’s not about what the devil wants, or what you want, or what the rest want you to do. It’s what your Father wants. “Not my will, but Thy will, be done.” Jesus prayed. Don’t give up and go back to life away from God, a time when you didn’t know any better. Example—the child who didn’t know it was bad to sneeze with his mouth open. It may seem alluring and inviting to give in and to go back, “Forget about the tissue!” Or, as the devil keeps whispering, “Think of all the time, fun, money, freedom you’ll have!” It’s a lie and ignorance. In fact, sin makes a person stupid! Like the church member turned thief who thought it was so easy and so much fun, that one day he forgot to take off his mask when leaving the store. (True account.) Do not mold yourself to the form of the world--godless styles, entertainment, treasures, speech, values. It’s so easy to give in Scripture says “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed!” (Romans 12:2).

As you dwell in your diaspora surroundings, please have no misgivings about the one on whom you call. He will never double-cross you or leave you stranded because someone else is more desirable than you. God is not a “receiver of faces.” He does not turn to you, or away from you, based on mere looks or connections or church affiliation. He judges impartially and forgives in Christ. That’s a good thing. Now live and act as His children adopted in Jesus. God does not receive your face because He’s seen you around a long time, or you have relatives “high-up” with Him, or you put a lot of time and money into the kingdom. God looks in the heart, for faith in Christ. Do you shove God away! Conduct yourself with highest respect, reverence, and honor. Live and act accordingly.

Never forget what He “put down” to free you from the stupidity and prison of your sin, which you come by naturally. I don’t like to say that anyone’s father, grandfather, and great-grandfather are/were stupid or crooked, but that is indeed the case—for us all. None have any respectful pedigree in our family line. “We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Yet God has graciously rescued us at a price. He, God, did not “spend” that which is perishable to set you free and help you. He did not simply part with apples, potatoes, steak, and fish—all of which rot in a few days. He did not give up new clothes, a new home, or a new car, all of which can easily be ruined by fire, wind, water. He did not hand over valuable and durable, useful and beautiful things such as silver and gold, which too can be destroyed. He paid out something far more rare, exquisite and precious—the life-blood of His dear holy, beloved Son Jesus, spotless and precious, to buy you back. Luther wrote, “He has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver but with His holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death” (Explanation of 2nd Article). There is no discouragement, but encouragement for Scattered Ones in Christ!

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---