

SERMON FOR GOOD FRIDAY 2021

TEXT; 1 PETER 1: 14-19

THEME: JESUS' LOVE AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

In the name of Jesus:

What does Jesus's death mean for us? It means full forgiveness of our sins. It means being reconciled to the God who created us and loves us. The death of Jesus for sinners means many other things as well; Jesus has won for us by his cross many wonderful blessings before God, in this life and the next. But tonight I want to focus on one precious gift that our loving Savior has restored to us by his death: true meaning in life. In our text, Peter writes: "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." What does he mean that you are ransomed from "the futile ways inherited from your forefathers"? Peter's point here is more than just that our forefathers were sinners, and that they passed down to us sinful ways of life, so that we need to be rescued from our sin and from our futile ways.

Futility. It is an important biblical word. Futility. The word Peter uses here is the same word that the book of Ecclesiastes uses in its famous opening lines: “Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” Or as some translations say: “Vanity of vanities, everything is vanity!”

The Bible teaches that God created our world very good, and he created human existence in the world to be rewarding and fulfilling and meaningful. But the Bible also teaches that when our first parents disobeyed God, and sin and death entered the world, God cursed the creation and subjected it to futility and decay, that is, to the meaninglessness brought by death and time. Apart from Jesus there is truly no lasting meaning in this world. People come, people go. People build up buildings, and fires or nature or time destroy them. People accumulate experiences and memories, but soon they’re gone, and sooner or later, all is forgotten. They are forgotten. It’s been like this for centuries. It was like this for your great great-great-great-grandparents. (Do you know much about them?)

And it continues to be like this for us. These are the “futile ways inherited from your forefathers.” The world goes on and on and on, but never gets anywhere. The book of Ecclesiastes calls the futile existence of this life “a chasing after the wind.” It’s like a dog chasing its tail. What is the purpose of

your life? Where are you going, or maybe I should say, where are you getting to?

A hundred years ago, two thousand people climbed on board an ocean-going ship. It was a passenger ship, a high class ship. It was built strong and beautiful, intricately detailed, meticulously prepared for its maiden voyage. The Titanic, it was named. You've heard of it. The ship's horns blew, and it set out into open seas. The people on the dock cheered and waved, and the people on deck cheered and waved. And then, everyone on the ship threw themselves fully into the work and the amusements of the voyage. Do you know where they were going? You do know where they were going . . . they were going to the bottom of the North Atlantic Sea. Most were going to an icy death—their bodies lost forever. They would never see their loved ones again. So . . . they played shuffleboard, and the ladies drank tea and talked about the latest fashions, and the men smoked cigars and talked business. They amused themselves with card games and whiskey. Until the fourth night of the journey when the ship grazed an iceberg, filled with water, tipped up on end, and sank into the icy sea. And who cares who won the card game? Whether it was the very best cabin or something a little less? How the deck chairs were arranged? As it turned out, these things weren't all that important. In fact, given the way the trip ends, it was all meaningless. Futile.

We know where they were going. But they did not. Yet here is the amazing thing. We also know where we are going. It was the Titanic's maiden voyage. But our generation is not humanity's maiden voyage. Generations have come and gone before us. Generation after generation. They lived—some well, some not so well, some prospered, others scraped by, some lived in beautifully kept houses, others in ramshackle dwellings, some were wise, some were foolish, some worked hard, some hardly worked, some liked to have a good time, some couldn't even stand it if others had a good time, some were always true to their word, others you couldn't count on anything they said, some had great achievements, others very few—these many, many generations which have gone before us. They lived, like us, and like we most certainly will, they died. And what was the point of it all—their lives? Did any of it matter?

Philosopher Peter Kreeft writes: "Of the twenty-one great civilizations that have existed on our planet, ours, the modern West, is the first that does not have or teach its citizens any answer to the question why they exist." And he continues, "A [nice] way of saying this is that our society is pluralistic and leaves us free to choose or create our own ultimate values. A more candid way of saying the same thing is that our society has nothing but its own ignorance to give us on this, the most important of all questions."

Today the image of the cross of Jesus Christ is set before Christians.

What is happening here? Is this just one more futile image from a futile world?

A good man, cut off in the prime of life? Another sad story, to add to the tall, tall stack of sad stories that this broken world has seen?

As the disciples beheld Jesus suffer, and breath his last, it may have looked to them like a devastating scene of meaninglessness. It may have looked to them, at the moment, like another dead-end death that made everything that had come before pointless. But as you know, the Lord Jesus does not remain dead. And by his innocent suffering and death, and by his glorious resurrection, Jesus Christ has changed all the equations. As the precious blood of Jesus Christ is shed, the curse on this creation is being removed. The saving death of Jesus Christ matters, supremely. And because of his death, everything else now matters also. Now at last, our lives have meaning that lasts. This moment, the death of Jesus our Lord, brings meaning to our entire lives.

Dear friends, you have been “ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.” And what is this meaning that Jesus now fills our lives with? What is our purpose? God has placed us here to know him and to enjoy his love, forever. And our God, so full of love, has placed us here to

love one another. To love all—our parents, our siblings, our spouse, our children, our neighbors, our dearest friends, and even our harshest enemies. In whatever stations in life God places us, in all the vocations to which he calls us, we are here to love. To give ourselves for the good of others, as Jesus Christ, gave himself up so utterly, for us.

The Bible sometimes calls the lives of God's people "fruits." Our lives are like trees, planted by God, and we are here to bear fruit. And fruit is good and nourishing and sweet. But once fruit is picked, it doesn't last. It ripens and then rots and then it's gone. But the death and resurrection of Jesus have changed everything. Jesus teaches that if we remain in him and he in us, we will bear much fruit, and it will be "fruit that will last," "fruit that will abide." God will take up the works and the moments and the love of our lives, he will weave all of these things into his beautiful purposes, and he will make them count. Your everyday life, because of Jesus's cross, is now bearing fruit that will last. Your life and what you do matters, it matters forever. That's why the Apostle Paul writes: "My beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." When the drudgery and the endless details of daily life have you weary and worn down and life itself seems pointless, look to the cross. See Jesus there for you. Know that in the Lord your work is not in vain. For God

has ransomed you from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without blemish or spot.

Amen.