

SERMON FOR APRIL 23, 2023

TEXT: 1 PETER 1: 17-25

THEME: LIVING AS GOD'S PEOPLE

17 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, **18** knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. **20** He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you **21** who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. **22** Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, **23** since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; **24** the word of the Lord remains forever.”

In the name of Jesus:

In a book called *The New Normal*, Dr. Jennifer Ashton writes that the global pandemic has changed the way people live. In order to thrive in this changing world, people need to accept what the new normal is, and not what we want it to be. How exactly has things and life changed? Before the pandemic, merchandise was readily available on store shelves. Goods were plentiful. Travel was robust, and people didn't think twice about staying overnight in a motel. In order to make a living you would have to travel to work. And if you were sick, you wouldn't hesitate to go to the hospital or

doctor. But since the Covid pandemic, the new normal is radically different. Shelves in stores sit empty. There still are shortages for some goods, producing a spike in prices. People now would on the whole rather stay home rather than risk staying in a place where you don't know who stayed in the room before you. Many still travel to work but working from home has become an accepted practice. And if you wish to see a doctor, some opt to get medical help through a video link rather than risk going to see a doctor or to the hospital. It's the new normal, a new way of living that is radically different from how we have lived in the past.

As a result of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we as Christians are called to live radically different lives than what is lived in the world around us. We are called to be different, for as Peter writes: "you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God."

Yes, things are different out there, the world in which we live is in a fallen state and corrupted by sin. We see this as mistakes that someone makes are now magnified in the media and some people will always define you by the things you do wrong. And this is happening to ordinary people. Sadly, it is the world that we live in now. If you speak with anyone who has had a small

public voice, they will tell you that “they are waiting to get you” is the constant background in their lives. A letter to the editor will result in receiving hostile letters from those who disagree with you in return. Put something on social media, and just wait for the negative, vile responses. Every bad tweet, every bad take, every bad thought is preserved, cataloged, and spit back at you, continually, with a vengeance. (Adapted from an article by David French). Your mistake, your sin will be used by others in an attempt to define you. Your worst moments are magnified. You become known for what you have done wrong.

Where is the second chance? It is non-existent in the secular world. The sin you commit is like a stigma that is attached to you that you can't remove. Many call this the cancel culture. Many are just waiting to cancel you, to negate you, to ostracize you so that you are marginalized, minimalized, and taught such a lesson where you don't get a do over. You are judged and the judgment inflicted by others is overwhelming and suffocating.

The people Peter was writing to knew what it was like to be marginalized and minimized. They were poor people, immigrants, the outcasts of society. But Peter had good news for them. They were not

defined by their social status, by their wealth, or by their mistakes. God was a God of second chances. They had hope because they were now God's people.

Peter tells us that each of us has been born again by the power of the Resurrection of Jesus through the means of the Word of God. You have been reborn and are now a follower of Christ! This is what Peter is saying when he writes: "According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God."

God doesn't cancel He saves. He makes all things new. He who is dead is now alive in Christ, you have been born again in Baptism and by the Word to live for Jesus. You have been born again so that Jesus now lives in and through you. What you need, what I need, what the world needs, is Jesus.

Sadly many Americans today have an individualistic faith in Jesus, a faith which asks the question: "What's in it for me?" They believe in Jesus only if it is convenient or if it suits them. If they perceive things are going their way, they believe in Jesus. Others will only believe when they need Jesus, to heal their sick loved one, to answer their prayer, and when the prayer is answered and granted the way that they would like, they forget about Jesus and go on their merry way, just as in the story of the ten lepers who were cleansed of

their leprosy. All ten were cleansed but only one returned to give thanks. Similarly, many turn to Jesus because they want something from Jesus, but they don't want to fully commit to following Him.

For the Christians to whom Peter is writing, they knew nothing about a "what's in it for me" faith. For these Christians, their faith was a way of life. They trusted in Jesus to save them. Salvation wasn't just eternal salvation, it was temporal as well. Yes they believed that their sins were forgiven and they had eternal life, but they also looked to Jesus for help in whatever bad situation they found themselves in. These early Christians were willing to stake their lives on Jesus. They loved Jesus so much that they would be willing to die for Him. And some became martyrs of the faith. They just didn't have a head knowledge about Jesus, they possessed a personal faith given by the Church and witnessed by their life in the Church. They had a deep seated love for Jesus.

What was true for these Christians is true for you and me today. God has made us His special people in Jesus Christ. We are living in changing times, some have called it the passing of the Christian America. Going to church is not normal in today's society, as compared to earlier generations of Americans who went to church regularly. The Bible used to be respected by

many, today an increasing number of people don't believe in the Bible. Many grieve over what has been lost in church life.

Whatsmore, we are living in a divided time, in that every group that isn't your own is seen as a threat. Mob mentality is becoming more and more prevalent. History is littered with horrific examples of mob mentality that resulted in great evils justified by so-called truths propagated in the name of group unity or group survival.

But God has called you to be different, He has called you to a new normal. You have been born again by the Spirit who makes you holy in God's sight. You are forgiven. You are loved. By God. And your life has been changed with Good News and empowered by Good News, to live, not as others in the world live, but to live your life to the glory of God.

So, instead of thinking of yourself and living selfishly, seeking to fulfill your wants and desires, Christ has now become the center of your life. As Peter writes: ' Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.' Christ has forgiven you, He has washed away your sins, you have been made pure with the blood of the Lamb of God, so that you now can love the Lord with all your heart and in obedience to the Lord, love others sincerely from a pure heart.

God has brought you to this time, this place in your life and in the lives of others, to bring them hope and help in Jesus. You do that by focusing your life on Jesus and by sharing with others what Jesus has done for you. Time and again in the Gospels people's lives were changed because a follower of Jesus shared what Jesus had done for them. When you tell others what Jesus has done for you, it is a powerful way that God will use to bring hope to a people who desperately want to know that they are not defined by their mistakes, but that they are forgiven by Jesus and have another chance. That is what people who love Jesus do, they tell others their own stories about what Jesus has done for them, and God uses these stories to bring people to Christ.

Dear brother and sister in Christ, you have been born again to a living hope in Jesus. In these changing times one thing is certain, that Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. And what the world needs now is the hope that you have and that Jesus gives.

Amen