

Try to remember. A sermon preached on May 7, 2017 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: PSALM 126

I PETER 1:1-7

Peter's first letter was composed at a time when the followers of Jesus were besieged on all sides
Biblical scholars peg the letter's date in and about 64AD

It is the same time as the beginning of the great persecution of Christians under the Emperor Nero

The specifics of how believers were martyred are horrific and reflect not only the unbalanced mind of the Roman Emperor,
But also the overall bloodlust and violence of Roman society.

Again Biblical scholars believe the letter was written from Rome – the epicenter of the martyrdom and persecution of Jesus' followers.

So Peter writes this letter not from some secure location and under the protection of some prince or king

The letter's provenance then is one of suffering, anxiety and violent response to the followers of Jesus.

Peter knows on a deep personal level what fear,
 anxiety, worry, trouble,
 Let alone physical persecution can do to one's faith
 in the now Risen Jesus.

So out of his own experience,
 Out of his own conviction that Jesus' way will in
 time trump all the suffering, evil, violence, and just
 plain nastiness of the world Peter writes.

Peter knows that much encouragement and
 much hope must be injected into the lives of Jesus';
 followers,

If they are going to make it through this difficult
 time.

Nothing must be taken for granted
 The basic promises and truths of who Jesus is,
 Who God is and who we are – chosen by God –
 must be placed before the people.

Not in some boring format

No, the situation into which Peter first writes is
 dire.

Many of his readers are barely holding on to their
 faith in the Risen Lord.

So Peter essentially says throughout this
 letter – in the midst of what is happening all around
 us – try to remember whose you are.

Remember to whom you belong

Remember no matter what voices around tell you –
you ARE a child of God.

You are in the palms of his hands!

Today,

Most of us living in North America and the First World

Do not face physical persecution for believing in Jesus.

We do face persecution, but it is far more subtle and less life threatening. Come back to that in a moment.

However,

We must not forget that 1000's of Christians around the world are still martyred for their belief in the ways of Jesus and the person of Jesus.

Some years ago, I came across a very sobering statistic – more believers were martyred in the 20thc than in all the other centuries combined since Jesus' Resurrection.

And conditions for believers in many parts of the world in these first 17 years of the 21stc have not improved.

We not ought to be surprised – for Jesus made it clear on many occasions that we would suffer for being faithful and obedient to Him,
For trusting in Him above all others

While we here in North America rarely suffer physical persecution and martyrdom if we attend worship on Sunday

Or have a Bible app on our phones,
Persecution for our faith still exists!

It is just a little more subtle

For things like prosperity without an awareness
 that god is the ultimate and generous provider,
 Wealth that chooses to ignore the cries of the truly
 needy,
 Consumerism without self-imposed limits,
 Promotion of self at the expense of everyone and
 everything else is persecution of Christians is it not?
 Richard Foster, in his landmark book on the
 Spiritual Disciplines, titled simply Celebration of
 Discipline

Said that the 3 greatest dangers to spiritual growth
 were –noise, busyness and hurry

Each can undermine an assurance,
 A hope, a conviction in the love of the Risen Lord of
 the Church for each of us!

Peter's first letter then needs to be read and
 thought about by every generation of believer
 For suffering is all too real

And the values based solely on the
 world's givens – all too empty!

After identifying his first readers or audience,
 Peter sets the stage as it were for the whole letter

**² who have been chosen and destined by
 God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit
 to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be
 sprinkled with his blood:
 May grace and peace be yours in
 abundance.**

A very significant and necessary reminder that in spite of the madness and mayhem around us,
 In spite of the fear, worry and anxiety we may feel
 In spite of the sense of dread of 'what's next'
Try to remember – we are chosen by God.

God chooses us not based on our character or actions,
 But on his own merciful purpose
 All believers have been called and chosen by God
We are God's special chosen ones.
 Of course, we who are called still must respond and choose to follow Him
 But God acts first for us – always!

Grace – God's unmerited favour and love

Peace – the peace that Jesus made between us and God through his Son's death on the cross.
Only God can grant such wonderful gifts and God is a lavishly generous God

What Peter wanted his first audience to hear and know,
 That even though scattered as they were across the provinces of the Roman Empire,
Be united in your experience of Gods' grace and God's peace in your daily lives.

I wonder if the first readers of this letter paused at this point to allow his listeners a moment to absorb what Peter was calling them to remember. In the midst of persecution,

These words hold a deep meaning and great comfort do they not?

Know something....the words still hold a deep meaning and great comfort

And not just in a time of horrendous persecution –
BUT ALL THE TIME.

This is not just Peter saying – “Have a nice day”

No, to greet his audience with the words, **May the grace and peace be yours in abundance,**

Peter is calling to his readers’ minds and souls,
That God cares for YOU as a person.

The heart behind the universe is a gracious heart of love.

Peace is much more than just a lack of conflict
Peace with God means God has made it right
between him and you,

You now have insight and energy to work on your relationships with all others.

All this comes at a price you could not pay yourself – it was prepaid by Jesus on the Cross.

I wonder what difference it would make in our daily lives if we were to begin each day by reading a verse like this one in I Peter

And then remembering throughout the day and being expectant to see clear evidences of God’s grace and God’s peace in our lives and in the lives of others.

For those evidences are there – daily.

We however miss them because we have allowed an attitude my mother used to term Grumpy Joe Bear –become the default position!

Grace and peace in abundance – are truly ours says Peter. TRY TO REMEMBER THIS!

Try to remember daily the promises secured, fulfilled and confirmed by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Peter's first readers were probably wondering what the Resurrection meant for all people and for all time – for it seemed little,

If anything had changed politically.

The Romans were still in control and they were becoming more aggressive, violent and nasty to the followers of Jesus.

Peter tries to answer their hesitations and doubts about the Resurrection vs.3-5 of the letter --**by his mercy** – God's action toward us first.

God's compassion to us, even though we did not deserve such mercy.

A new birth and a living hope – through God's action,

In his Son's death and resurrection, we have been given a 'second chance'

We need no longer be weighed down by those wedges that drive into relationships with God, with others and within ourselves i.e. our sins.

We have a new life as it were

We have a hope that looks forward in eager anticipation to what God will do

We have a hope based upon a personal convicting that God will keep his promises.

Impossible?? No – this says Peter is the new way,

Secured by God’s action in Christ for us

And Peter adds – it is a gift **an inheritance that is**

- Imperishable – it will never pass away, disappear or come to ruin as the result of enemy forces attacking
- undefiled – it can never become unfit or polluted by sin.
- Unfading – it will never lose its freshness or glory. It will never die away
- Kept in heaven for you – God keeps the inheritance – *what Jesus has accomplished for all people and for all time*

No matter what harm might come to believers on earth,

The inheritance waits, for it is kept safe with God.

I wonder if the first readers paused after each adjective and let the listeners absorb what Peter is saying.

I hope so.

For each adjective is important to consider in our lives!

The Resurrection then is not some removed from real life spiritual truth

It is central to the Christian faith.

It is gift, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and hope from God for each and every one whom God chooses and each and every one who responds – yes, I will follow!

It is one of the “great things God has done for us”.

Try to remember this

Then in vs. 6-7, Peter address a reality his readers knew about all too well – **suffering various trials (vs.6)**

Peter says that though the trials will not be forever, they are in essence a test to show the genuineness of our faith,

So that the genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed

This has to be one of the hardest truths and realities to which Peter calls us to remember.

If Peter were not writing this, I suspect his first audiences, just as modern day listeners would dismiss the words as just that – words, words, words – talk

But about suffering Peter, like all the disciples knew a great deal.

So in this particular area his words are credible!

This matter of suffering – whatever form it takes

Since God does not answer why questions,
 there are no simple or simplistic answers
 Suffering – internal or external – in our lives or in
 the lives of others – others we know and others we
 do not – often cuts through a whole lot of chaff in
 our lives

What we thought was really important, is no
 longer.

What we thought we needed, wanted or had to
 have now seems very empty.

The stuff or things around which we surround
 ourselves and see as necessary to life are now seen
 as just stuff and things – maybe even as clutter!

Difficult though it is to *try to remember*
the reality that suffering has in God's time a purpose,
 It remains sound counsel.

I wonder whether Peter's first audience or listeners
 shook their heads and thought Peter to be callous or
 insensitive as they heard his words

I wonder if some said – outwardly or internally –
 Peter doesn't know about MY SUFFERING.

I wonder if readers of the letter today are turned off
 by these two verses 6-7 and therefore dismiss the
 letter,

If not all of scripture as stuff and nonsense
 I wonder...

Look, like it or not, Peter does point
 uncontestable realities we must *try to remember.*

Suffering in the lives of God's people will happen.
 Being a follower of Jesus does not magically
 transport us to an existence where there are no
 more tears, pain and sorrow!

*No individual's suffering escapes God's notice and
 attention.*

Now hear me, I do not say this to be
 insensitive
 I say it seeing faces and situations about which I
 still have a lot of questions to ask God.
 However like St. Paul seeing through a glass darkly,
 I have seen enough to say – I don't have all the
 answers,

I may not have all the questions, but I know enough
 about the mercy, love, grace and forgiveness of God
*To hold in hope that no suffering escapes God's notice
 and control.*

Grief and suffering do not happen without cause or
 reason.

I may not see or know the cause or reason in my
 lifetime,

But I am prepared to trust God to carry out his
 purposes,

Even and especially in times of trial.

He who suffered for us will NOT ABANDON US.

What Peter calls the persecuted of the 1st
 century, believers today to try to remember is not
 easy. Beware of those who say, it is!

Yet, if we are to follow Jesus with our hearts as well as our heads, try we must.

Peter gives us no other option....AMEN