

WELCOME 7th May 2023 – 5th SUNDAY IN EASTER '23 A

1 Peter 2:11-25

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." "We have met the enemy & he is us." "Hi...My name is _____ & I'm an alcoholic." However we say it...However much we want to deny it...Sometimes the greatest threat we face is the face that stares back at us in the mirror. Sometimes the greatest challenge in our world is the world we create by our own beliefs, thoughts & actions. Sometimes the biggest obstacle to following Jesus faithfully is the person standing in my shoes.

"Dear friends, (Beloved) I warn you as 'temporary residents & foreigners' to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls."

In a world that turns up the heat against us & our faith, we are called to not add fuel to the fire or jump straight into it. Our call is to **'reach'** not just **'resist'** those around us who are not yet part of the family of Christ.

For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, & you must follow in his steps.

We are called to reveal the face of Christ in the most challenging circumstances... to witness to the power of Christ that triumphs over the painful brokenness of the world...to live as believable witnesses to the power that raised Christ from the dead & gives us his victory ... **You** are face of Jesus wherever you are.

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord, we come as we are, to become what you meant us to be. We come as we are, afraid at times, broken at all times, full of disappointments...We ask you to make us whole. Set us free. We come as we are with our plans and our dreams, our joys and our sorrows to be touched by your grace and transformed by your love, so that you plans and your dreams for us may be realized. We come as we are trusting that you will makes us what you desire. Thank you for mercy that reaches out, for patience that waits for our return, and for love that is always ready to welcome us and bring us home to the Father...Jesus in your Name we pray...Amen

Let's sing Only A Holy God...

FAITH CHAT:

1. In your opinion, how is the church's witness most compromised today? How do you feel called to correct or address that?
2. Why are our "worldly" or "sinful" desires so difficult to control at times? What do you do to live obedient to Jesus while still engaging in a sinful world filled with sinful people? (To live "in" but not "of" the world)

5TH SUNDAY IN EASTER '23 A – THE NEW NORMAL: LIVING WITH OPPOSITION

History tells us that in 1805 at Buffalo Creek, New York, a group of Indigenous Native American chiefs & warriors were gathered to hear a presentation of the gospel from the Boston Missionary Society. After the speaker concluded his talk, Red Jacket, one of the leading chiefs, is said to have responded: “**Brother**, we are told you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while to see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest & less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again what you have said.” (from Warren Wiersbe)

That’s not a story about cross-racial relationships. Neither is it a story about how colonizers & first inhabitants learn to relate to one another. It is the proper question not-yet-believers ask about the influence of the gospel...about how the certainty & power of the resurrection...Christ’s triumph over sin death & evil can transform lives. **Is** the good news powerfully at work transforming those who believe into the likeness of the One in whom they believe? Well is it?

Remember...Peter writes to followers of Jesus who are surrounded by multitudes in the Empire who live other expressions of faith...who worship, sacrifice, & give their lives to a wide array of beliefs, worldviews & gods...just not Jesus. The church of Jesus Christ always exists as a lifeboat in a wild ocean of pagan non-Xn faith. So Peter wants us always to keep in the forefront of our hearts & minds our call & our position before the world...our identity & our purpose...which is...

You are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation; God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light....some translations say “so you may proclaim the excellencies of God...” who called you into his light...So that the world can see **IN YOU** & hear **FROM YOU** the exceeding abundance of love life joy peace & hope God gives in rescuing & restoring us through Christ’s death & resurrection...Our identity & purpose as the rescued is to declare rescue in Christ to the perishing...hope to the despairing...salvation to the lost...as the rescued to live as instruments & agents of the Rescuer.

This is for Peter & the church where the rubber hits the road & the biggest pothole on that road...is...us. “**Dear friends**, (Beloved) I warn you as “temporary residents & foreigners’ to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.” The old self, drowned in baptism into Christ has incredible swimming ability & threatens to pop back to the surface of our lives if we’re not on constant guard. This is the heart of this part of the letter...**How** do we live as evidence of the gospel in a society that not only doesn’t share, but openly mocks, faith in Jesus & devotion to God’s

Word as the foundation, source & guide for our lives? Peter’s answer...**The** church should be living advertisements to the difference Jesus makes.

History time...Roman society was built on 3 pillars. There were 3 fundamental relationships ^{w/in} the Empire that were essential to the good order of the Empire. Think about it...they’re self-evident. **State** to Citizen. **Slave** to Master. **Husbands** & wives. We’ll look at these in order...1st – state to citizen – The relationship of the state to the citizen is basic in any well-ordered society. Peter reminds us we can’t escape our role as citizens of Australia even though this really isn’t our home. As Xns we live with a wonderfully complex dual citizenship. We are citizens of nations on this earth **AND** the kingdom of heaven. **But...dual** citizenship **is not equal** citizenship. Our allegiance to Christ supersedes our allegiance to country. Nowhere on this world...is “home.” Our ultimate allegiance to the Sovereign Father-God is far above any & all earthly rulers or sovereignty under which we might temporarily live. Our allegiance to Christ supersedes our allegiance to country.

We worship heaven’s king. We obey heaven’s demands. We serve heaven’s call. We proclaim heaven’s message. We seek heaven’s reward. But even as strangers, aliens, foreigners weirdos in this world, we can’t simply ignore the realities imposed upon us by the state. We pay taxes. We obey speed limits. Civil law exists so the greatest good is carried out for the greatest number of people. We live in accord with that. Clearly Peter does not ask us to compromise our faith under the dictates of governmental law, but to rebel against or reject civil law that which does not compromise our faith in Christ is to side with evil. To tear down/destroy for the sake of self-interest or to see it all burn is evil. Disobedience to earthly authority simply because we want to be our own authority is evil. So we also “submit to human authority” & “honour the king.”

Proverbs 8 is a wisdom Proverb. It reminds us that God speaks to us through wisdom which is how God orders the Creation & speaks through his Word & ultimately it is reveals itself to us as Jesus who lives out God’s wisdom which grants salvation through his death & resurrection. **Pr 8:34-36** - Blessed are those who listen to me...For those who find me find life & receive favour from the Lord... But...all who hate me love death.” Hate me = love death That’s evil. A large part of what we see tearing at the fabric of human societies in the 21st cent is evil aimed at the overthrow of civil order. It has no grand design or greater good except the exaltation of self & rejection of God’s wisdom...That has no place Peter says, among the people of God. Our call is to **‘reach’** this world with the good news of Christ not just **‘resist’** the tug of our old selves toward those things in the world which neither Christ nor Scripture bless or endorse.

2nd pillar of the Empire was the relationship of slave to master. Slavery in the Roman world was not the grinding abusive cruelty that arose later when African tribes conquered captured & sold neighbouring tribes to Western slave traders; or that exists today in the flesh trade of Southeast Asia/Latin America. Romans slaves were often treated as part of the family...quite often highly respected & recognized in the wills of their masters. There were provisions in the Empire for a slave to be granted freedom & the rights of citizenship in the realm. So what's in play? At every level, your behaviour, even when treated unjustly & unfairly is seen as a witness to your ultimate Lord & Master, Jesus; so act such that rather than a reason to distrust or despise you, those in authority over you grow in respect for & trust in you & see through your behaviour a deeper reality than simply the tasks you are expected to accomplish when told. Let the world see your commitment to justice...that you pursue & practice the good beautiful & true...that you are devoted to doing the greatest good for the most people...and ultimately & eventually they see Jesus...

For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, & you must follow in his steps. Peter's evangelistic strategy is to live so far above reproach that no one can challenge your integrity, honesty, & trustworthiness & therefore begin to see in you a credible witness to Jesus. It's awful when the church or one of its leaders gets stuck in the muck & mire of scandal. A millionaire rockstar preacher with his hand in the till or on his secretary's backside does no one any good. One more Tax Office inquiry, Royal Commission or 60 Minutes exposé we don't need. I don't need to preach your funeral & then have your next-door neighbour come to me at the wake & tell me all the stuff I really don't want to know. Live such good lives among your heathen neighbours that when God returns to judge the world they'll give him glory because of what they've seen in you even if they never took time to believe it for themselves.

Chapter 3 begins similarly regarding the relationship between husbands & wives. We didn't read that today, but the command is the same. Peter does NOT say wives submit to your husbands because they have the right to boss you around. Peter says submit so you might win them to Christ. Three times Peter says, in the face of unjust treatment (1:17; 2:18; 3:2), live with respectful deference to those who don't deserve it. Which means, don't be a doormat but actively **LOVE** the one doing you wrong so that your faith is seen for what it is & not as rebellion & hostility, & becomes a revelation of God's grace through you. **AND** he says what would have been revolutionary in the 1st century...*"In the same way, you husbands must give honour to your wives... she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered."* Equal partners/co-heirs in God's grace...

absolutely crucial in maintaining your relationship with the Father. Only the church can truly teach husbands how best to lead their households & love their wives & children...& when we Xn fathers fail or abdicate our role...when we fail in our responsibilities...society suffers & the witness to the gospel falters.

However we say it...However much we want to deny it...Sometimes the greatest threat we face as the church is the face that stares back at us in the mirror. Sometimes the greatest challenge in our world is the world we create by our own beliefs, thoughts & actions that don't advance the gospel. Sometimes the biggest obstacle to following Jesus faithfully is the person standing in my shoes. **"Dear friends, (Beloved) I warn you as 'temporary residents & foreigners' to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls."**

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TAKE IT HOME -

Where is God calling you to be a credible witness to life in Christ this week?

Who will you allow to hold you accountable for that?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus, you are the resurrection & the life, the promise of new life in you is a breath of fresh air in a dry dying land. You make all things new. Let that be us...by your Spirit plant your Word not just in our minds, but also in the deeper yearnings of our heart and soul. Make us radiant in your new creation to shed light on everyone we meet. Build into our lives the unlimited capacity to imitate you in all we are & do, & grant us the wisdom & boldness to share your love with those all around us. In your name we pray... Amen