

WELCOME 21st May 2023 – 7th SUNDAY IN EASTER '23 A

1 Peter 4:7-19 & 5:6-14

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... "Don't eat your seed corn." Even I know seed corn is what you set aside to plant NEXT YEAR... It's today's investment in tomorrow. Eat that now...Live like there's **no** tomorrow; & there may not be. **BUT...**if you live investing in the future; like you know there's a destination goal future you're moving toward...you'll have one.

In his grace God called you to share in his **eternal glory** by means of Christ Jesus. We live toward that future...our living hope is neither pipe dream nor wishful thinking. We've been *born again into a living hope because God raised Jesus from the dead & into an inheritance (certainty) that never fades fails or passes away...we are God's very own possession living to make the face of Jesus visible to the world...*

So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, & strengthen you, & will place you on a firm foundation. All power to him forever! Amen.

In a world that is harsh at the best of times, among folks who will often turn their worst against your best, Jesus calls us to live from his unlimited power in us now - until the day we share in the fullness of his victory & eternal glory.

We live each day from the unshakable conviction that in Christ in us every enemy is powerless against the power of his resurrection. We trust that in every circumstance, God's hand holds you & his love sustains you. We cling to the Father's assurance that nothing can separate you from his love & the future he intends for you is brighter than any current darkness.

Remember...When you walk with the world, the world is all you have, but when you walk in faith in Christ the grace of all eternity is yours now.

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

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy and gracious saving Father, let this day be a worthy celebration of Christ's resurrection & the living hope into which you have brought us. In the light streaming from the empty tomb, move our hearts to be free from worry, unchained from fear, & released from distraction. Open our minds to your Spirit that we may love you more deeply, obey you more fervently & worship you more fully...Through Jesus, our living brother, Saviour and friend we pray...Amen.

Let's hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. How are your circumstances (especially bad ones) an opportunity to show others that Jesus is more precious to you than anything else?
2. Where are you most likely to be "forced" to choose between doing what you know God directs you to do & a compromise with something less than that?

7TH SUNDAY IN EASTER '23 A – THE NEW NORMAL: LIVING INTO ETERNITY

The sun'll come out tomorrow
Bet your bottom dollar
that tomorrow
There'll be sun

Just thinkin' about tomorrow
Clears away the cobwebs
and the sorrow
'Til there's none

Classic song from the musical “Annie” – the wistful wishful yearning that situations, circumstances, & results will be different...tomorrow. The longing for luck to turn, & easier times to appear out of nowhere...just thinking about it. But deep down our experience is...different. “Clears away the cobwebs & the sorrow ‘til there’s none?” I’ve sat at too many dining tables where the empty chair or the family photos/memories told another story. *cobwebs/sorrow* were still there We live aware things sometimes don’t & afraid they won’t change...circumstances we’re in will persist. When that is what tomorrow brings & the one after...then what?

If we’ve heard anything listening to Peter...we know **HE KNOWS** when we’re ^b/_t a rock/hard place...whether you’re scorned/attacked as one who wears the name of Jesus boldly/publicly or you’re in the Cancer Centre when you were hoping to be on holidays...suffering from malice or just misadventure...in a world broken & twisted by sin/death/evil: pain & tragedy tears & distress are part & parcel of everyday life. Somewhere part of creation is up all night crying its eyes out & some nights it’s you. **AND...** Jesus is no silver bullet or bullet-proof vest. The cross around my neck is no magical defense. Baptism does not confer immunity from heartache or hardship.

Peter encourages us to **live** the certainty of our lives secured in the risen Jesus Christ into the uncertainties of suffering & turmoil in this world. Look @ vss 7-11: **The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest & disciplined in your prayers. Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay. God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength & energy God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory & power to him forever & ever! Amen.**

Somewhere you may have heard someone say “The future belongs to those who show **up**.” Usually they’re talking about politics/population/employment. Politicians who win are those who get their voters to show up & vote. The culture, society, or country that keeps having children is the one that survives. Every boss wants workers who are there & ready to get the job done. (applies to other arenas of life too)

Peter says **KEEP SHOWING UP**. Be earnest & disciplined sober-minded & alert serious & dedicated in prayer...always be ready to pray & seek the Father about a person or circumstance. Overwhelm the world w/ your generosity & hospitality. Out give, out **forgive**, & out love everyone you know. Serve from the Father’s limitless supply of strength/power. **KEEP SHOWING UP** ready to contribute - to help - to care – to bless...**Always** ready to share the hope you have in Christ. **KEEP SHOWING UP** among the faithful for worship even when you’d rather be somewhere else...There’s always a reason for you to be here to be challenged & to challenge someone else...**Heb 10:24-25** – “Let us consider how to provoke one another to love & good deeds. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another all the more as you see the Day approaching.” “The early church was married to poverty, prisons, & persecutions. Today, the church is married to prosperity, personality, & popularity.” – Ravenhill...Peter wants us to live w/ the robust sense of urgency that we may not get another tomorrow. Each passing day is 1 day closer to **EITHER** Jesus’ return or your death. You & I are always 1 day closer to seeing face-to-face...so don’t waste today. **KEEP SHOWING UP** ready to do whatever is called of you by the Holy Spirit live that robust sense of urgency

Then...Don’t be surprised if the world around you returns its worst as a response to your best...or if something terrible greets you on your way out the door. **Don’t** be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening...Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world. Over & over Peter reminds us: On the cross of Jesus Christ, God bears the full brunt - absorbs the full weight of human sinfulness & the chaos sin scatters in our lives. In the suffering/death/resurrection of Jesus we see our ultimate healing & the coming end of all suffering & pain. Through his death we are given life.

Yet in the heartbreak & deep trauma that often attends this life...We are **NEVER** alone even on the worst days...When we suffer, when the pain is great, when tears won’t stop, for whatever reason...what we experience in that moment, Jesus has already felt in whips, thorns, & nails. Don’t be caught off guard by pain, but don’t for a minute believe you’re alone **in it**. Years ago I read something by the famous atheist Richard Dawkins: “...some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, & you won’t find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely...at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.” Peter says, “Bunk!”

In Christ God offers more than “pitiless indifference.” Suffering & death – heartache & loss are **NOT** God’s intention for us & are **NOT** what he desires for those he loves. *You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness. Evil will never be your guest.* - **Ps 5:4**
But in a world where humans rebel & choose self-rule over submission/obedience to

the Father who created us for himself, there is & will be more pain than we can imagine or possibly predict. But in that anguished moment – whatever it is – **THIS** is most certainly true: *You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.* **Ps. 56:8** God is neither absent nor indifferent. God has not turned loose...let go...walked away...forgotten your name or where you live. God holds you where you are & will keep you in his love & grace so that you can live in that place as his child. **Give** all your worries & cares to God, for **he cares about you**. Don't be caught off guard by pain, but don't for a minute believe you're alone in it. God loves you to the point of sending his one & only Son to share your suffering/death so that you may find life in him beyond the reach of pain, agony, tears, & death.

I find it absolutely crucial that immediately after that assurance Peter then warns: **"Stay alert!** Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, & be strong in your faith. Peter does not want us to grow complacent or proud. The enemy always stands ready to trick trap or trip us up. There is always a bid being made for our souls to get us to shift our allegiance away from the sure living hope we have in Jesus. But that persistent work of the enemy should not be occasion for fear. Fear only shows us obstacles & threats. Faith is fixed on the expansive eternal sovereignty of God who in Christ crucified/risen has committed to us his presence, power, & provision in all things. God's horizon is infinite & eternal. The Father will never run out of blessing – provision – care. *Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?* – **Rom 8:32** Intimacy with God is the best defense against being intimidated by the world.

Peter writes knowing that even that promise...assured certainty...will at times feel insufficient for the terrors this world throws at us & we will be tempted to curl up in a ball, put our heads under the blanket & hide...or yield to the world's pressures & live like there is no tomorrow & nothing really matters except reducing my stress, struggle, & strife. But the risen Jesus & the living hope, unyielding certainty, & specific call to be his face here now remind us there is a future beyond this world... There is a purpose, goal, & destiny toward which we live. Peter encourages us to live the certainty of our lives secured in the risen Jesus Christ into the uncertainties of suffering & turmoil in this world. This world is not our final destination. *In his grace God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, & strengthen you, & will place you on a firm foundation. All power to him forever!* **Amen.** restore support strengthen secure you in his love

We live toward that future...our living hope is neither pipe dream nor wishful thinking Paul writes...*That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small & won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them & will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever* **2 Cor 4:16-18.** Faith is fixed on the expansive eternal sovereignty of God who in Christ crucified/risen has committed to us his presence & power & provision in all circumstances...in all things.

In a world that is harsh at the best of times, among folks who will often turn their worst against your best, Jesus calls us to live from his unlimited power in us now - until the day we share in the fullness of his victory & eternal glory. We live each day from the unshakable conviction that in Christ in us every enemy is powerless against the power of his resurrection. We trust that in every circumstance, God's hand holds you & his love sustains you. We cling to the Father's assurance that nothing can separate you from his love & the future he intends for you is brighter more secure & more lasting than any current darkness.

When we walk with the world, the world is all we have, but when we walk in faith in Christ the grace of all eternity is ours now.

TAKE IT HOME –

If you knew, you had no more tomorrows, how would you spend today?

What would it take for you to do that in some measure this week?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Living Lord Jesus, you appeared to your disciples in their hour of fear & gave your Spirit to encourage their anxious hearts. Come to us by that same Spirit & open our hearts so we can boldly live our hope in you in our world. Equip us to bring peace to those trapped in sorrow or distress and courage to those shackled by worry & alarm. Strengthen our faith & intensify our witness so that we offer to others your promise of abundant life, unceasing joy & unending love///In your Name we pray...Amen