

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“Called to Be Holy”
Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19
I Peter 1:13-23**

**Third Sunday of Easter
April 30, 2017**

Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19

I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the Lord: “O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!”

What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord, I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

Introduction

I mentioned last week that the lectionary readings through Pentecost include selections from the First Epistle of the Apostle Peter. While I have read bits and pieces of First Peter and I know some of its themes, I’ve never really dived into the details of this Letter. And one of the classic ways of Scripture exposition, which developed out of the Reformation, is one called *lectia continua*. This is the process of taking a passage from Scripture and examining it verse by verse. We saw last week, in Peter’s introduction, that he is writing to Christians spread out across parts of the Roman Empire. He spoke about our inheritance, which is fixed and purchased through our rebirth by the work of Christ. He also spoke briefly about trials and their effects on creating genuine faith in believers. Today, we continue our look into chapter one, verses thirteen to twenty-three.

I Peter 1:13-23

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 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. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 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.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

“Called to Be Holy”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is

the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

In our look into First Peter, we now jump ahead in our passage to verse thirteen. The Apostle starts a new section, and we know this because he starts with “therefore.” This word acts both as a transition and as a reminder. He wants us to keep in mind our rebirth, because he’s now about to expand a little more on that topic. “Therefore,” since you are indeed born again Christians, it is wise to “prepare your minds for action.” Now, the actual Greek doesn’t say that. If you have the King James Version of the Bible, you’ll see it reads “gird up the loins of your mind.” What?! Back in the day when men wore robes, they would prepare themselves for hard labor or for battle by tying their robes around their thighs. I asked Betsy if I should demonstrate it for y’all, but she rightly talked me out of it. Maybe next time. But Peter is here saying to prepare your minds for intensive and strenuous action. What lies ahead is going to take a lot of work. A modern way of saying this is “fasten your seat belts” or “roll up your sleeves.” “Be ready to see God work and to respond to him with instant obedience.”¹ This and many other passages of Scripture teach us that the Christian life is not a passive activity. When you’re born again, you don’t just sit down and wait for the Second Coming. There’s work to be done, commands to obey, and people to serve. The Christian ought to be ready to follow Christ on the way of the cross.

In preparation for this action, Peter charges us to be “sober-minded.” Generally speaking, it is not wise to live life drunk, but I don’t think this is necessarily a prohibition against drinking alcohol. I know some churches use passages like these to prohibit all consumption of alcohol, but I think that’s a gross misinterpretation. Having said that, some scholars interpret this merely as “pay attention to what follows.” I think minimizing this call to sobriety as simply a transitional statement is also a gross misinterpretation of Scripture. I do think Peter is calling us to sobriety and preparedness. We shouldn’t seek to live life inebriated and incapacitated. Perfect holiness, while unattainable in this life, nonetheless ought to be a rule of life and sought after. Seeking holiness, then, requires we be “sober-minded.” By doing so, we are to desire and be ready to follow Christ’s commands to love God and neighbor at any time and in any place.

Once we are prepared and sober-minded, Peter says to “set your hope fully” on grace. What is hope; and specifically what is Christian hope? The Letter to the Hebrews says faith is the conviction of things *hoped* for. What is this hope that is so intimately connected to our faith? “Biblical Hope is a firm conviction that the future promises of God will be fulfilled...it is an assurance of what will come to pass...The Christian [then] is called to hope, that is, to have full assurance of the resurrection of God’s people and the coming of God’s kingdom.”² Christian hope is nothing like wishful thinking, such as, “I hope I get an ‘A’ on this test” or “I hope I get this promotion.” Our hope is closely connected with eschatology. Now eschatology is the theological word for the End Times, or that moment in the future when God will bring his Kingdom into full fruition. This is why Peter says that our hope is set “on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Tyndale NT Commentaries: 1 Peter*, Grand Rapids; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988. Page 76.

² *Reformation Study Bible*, “Hope,” page 2206.

The Christian hope is both right now and not yet. We have a hope right now, you and I can hope because of the work of Jesus Christ and the influence of the Holy Spirit. We know assuredly that Christ is ours and we are his, but we don't yet fully experience that union. Furthermore, Peter's use of "fully" "implies a very confident and eager expectation." This hope, the Christian hope, not only encourages downcast believers to persevere, "but also prompts a reordering of priorities according to God's agenda."³ What sustains us through present strife and encourages us to action is the knowledge that when Christ returns, his faithful will receive his blessings. This is important to know because Peter is now going to shift gears and lift up examples of pursuing holiness, which is an action born out of Christian hope.

The Apostle now reintroduces some familial language. Back in verses three through five, Peter speaks of God as the Father of Jesus Christ and the church as born again to an inheritance. Paul uses familial language in Romans eight where he says we are sons and daughters of God by a Spirit of adoption, and as children, who call God "Abba, Father," then we are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." This is inspiring to know that we are heirs of God's kingdom because of Christ's work. Too often, however, people forget to finish that verse seventeen of Romans chapter eight. We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, "provided," adds St. Paul, "we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." Being adopted Children of God and heirs of his kingdom does not always promise peace and tranquility in this life. In fact, our adoption requires us to be "obedient children" "and model [our] behavior on [our] divine Father by substituting the passions characteristic of" pre-born-again lives.⁴ And this, my beloved, puts us at enmity with the world and as objects of ridicule.

Peter reinforces this by directing "do not be conformed." The Greek word related to this phrase is *schema*, and we know that as a blueprint, a figure, or an arrangement. The idea is to pattern one's life. What is the pattern of your life? Whose blueprints do you follow in life? There are two main *schemas* of life. There's the world's pattern for life and then there's God's pattern for life. The world's blueprints include seeking after personal gains, achieving your own goals at all costs, forcing others to bow down. The world's blueprints say you don't need to follow the law, you don't need to appeal to morality and ethics, you can do whatever you want. These and many others are what Peter calls "the passions of your former ignorance." Now, for Peter's original audience, there was a clear distinction between their pre-Christian and their born again lives. For many of us, however, we were born Christians, but ignorance is, nevertheless, still there. For us, though, it's less that we don't know and more like we don't *want* to know, or we choose to ignore the commands of Christ. God's pattern of life is one of humility, service, charity, peace, piety, and love. Thankfully, "the Holy Spirit's regenerating work has broken the ruling, dominating force" of the passions of our ignorance, and "it is possible for Christians to have a significant measure of victory over them."⁵ And now Peter tells us how we are able to do this.

We know he's coming to a shift in thought because he starts verse fifteen with "but." "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but!" But what? Don't be like your former selves, don't be patterned by the world, instead be like this: "Be

³ Grudem, 76.

⁴ PHEME PERKINS, *Interpretation Bible Commentary: I & II Peter*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995. Page 36.

⁵ Grudem, 78.

holy, as he who called you is holy.” If there’s one thing to remember it is this: God has called you by name. God has called you as son or daughter. And by God’s wonderful and gracious work, you are born again. God is the first actor in all of this, and since God himself is holy, “you also be holy.” Now, God’s holiness and our holiness are related, but they’re very different. God is holy because he is wholly other, that’s w-h-o-l-l-y, wholly other. While God is indeed near us, he is also far from us. We can’t experience God in full force or we would die. Moses was sheltered in a cave when God walked by and allowed Moses to glimpse God’s backside because God is holy. God’s holiness also includes God’s perfection. God is pure life, pure good, in whom, James tells us, “there is no variation or shadow due to change.” Moreover, God can do whatever he wants, except go against his nature. Which means God doesn’t tempt us with evil, God can’t lie, God can’t sin, because God’s nature is perfect and pure and good. That’s God’s holiness.

We, on the other hand, we cannot be fully perfect, fully pure, and fully good. We are tempted by evil, we lie, we sin, there is a shadow of turning in each of us. Our holiness, therefore, is more like being set apart. Peter says not to be conformed by the passions of former ignorance, by this he means we are not to pattern ourselves after the blueprints of iniquity. Others may and do prefer to follow in that path, but we are called to be different. We are called to walk another path, the way of the cross. And so Peter says, be holy “in all your conduct.” Be set apart in what you do, be different in the way you think and act. Paul says to put on the mind of Christ. This idea of holiness, or set-apart-ness isn’t unique to the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God set Israel apart from the other nations. That’s why the Jews have so many laws; Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, those were written to give the Israelites guidelines on how to live as people set apart for God. And when Israel sinned against God, it was by taking on aspects and attitudes of its neighbors. The worship of other gods, the exploitation of the poor and the widows, the overwhelming desire of personal gain. That’s how the world runs, but not in God’s house.

The Christian, too, is called to be set apart from sin because God himself is apart from sin. The question arises, how are we to be holy? Well the first step is to renounce evil and sin. Last week when we confirmed our baptized members into full membership, I asked our youth do they renounce evil. That’s where we start, though the reality is we will sin. But when we do, we are to recognize it as such and not delight in sinning. Remember the Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*? It is literally a change in mind. Where the mind and the heart are, there will our conduct be. Holiness is being like God, well as close as sinful humans can be, which means God cares more that we *try* to be holy than actually achieving holiness on our own. Holiness, then, means setting ourselves apart for Christ’s service. And Christ teaches us that the greatest commandment is to love God with our whole selves and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Unending devotion to God and unbounded care for others define acts of righteousness, which we are to do on this path of holiness.

In this same holiness vein, Peter reminds us again of our relationship to God as our divine parent if we “call on God as Father.” Since God is an “impartial judge,” that is God delights in things that reflect his moral character, and is our Heavenly Father, then we, as children, ought to imitate God, specifically, God’s moral character. Now I’m not saying we are to take God’s role upon ourselves and play the part of judge, jury, and executioner. No, we are still subservient to God.

We are, however, to respect God like good children respect their parents. Just as little children are want to model their parents and imitate them, we, as children of God, ought to do likewise. You know what I'm talking about. You know when little kids play grown up or they say things they hear from their parents. Children naturally learn from repeating and doing. Heavenly Children learn how to interact with the world by reading in Scripture how God interacts with his creation. And if there is one word that sums up God's interaction and viewpoint, that word is love. And we are to be imitators of that love, set apart, because the world does not love with the love of Christ.

The reason we can and should model this love is because we know we "were ransomed." Why do we respect God? Why do we love God? Why do we imitate God? Because we are his heirs, God's children. This new state of ours, this adoption, was brought by our redemption to God through Jesus Christ. St. Paul teaches: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."⁶ And "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace."⁷ Jesus' work on the cross, his crucifixion, death, and resurrection, the very witness of God's love, is our pattern for life. By Christ's mold is how we conform ourselves. As born again Christians we are adopted into a new inheritance, which nullifies "the futile ways inherited from our forefathers." People like inheritances. I like inheriting things. People like leaving inheritances for their children and grandchildren or leaving endowments for schools or churches. And those are great. There's nothing wrong with that. The inheritance we have in God, however, is way more precious than "perishable things such as silver or gold." In fact, Peter notes "the precious blood of Christ" is infinitely better and infinitely more valuable than riches or fancy cars or big houses. Why? Like the Paschal Lamb, Christ was "without blemish or spot," and yet he was still willing to take our sins and our blemishes on himself; so that when we stand before God's judgment seat, God sees not our failings and not our sins, but the spotless and precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Peter now explains a little more to us about Jesus. He says in verse twenty that Christ "was foreknown before the foundation of the world." The opening verses of John's Gospel remind us that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God;" and "all things were made through him."⁸ Not only was Christ at the foundation of the world, but also "was made manifest in the last times." In the Revelation of John, the Lord tells the Apostle, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."⁹ Peter is here saying that the work of Christ in all of human history was "for the sake of you." Christ's redeeming work in this world was done for you, on your behalf. Christ did this purely out of love. And he did this for everyone. The only thing we need to do is "through him" "believe in God." The effectualness of Christ's sacrifice has always been there, we just need to grasp ahold of it and claim it as ours. In this way "your faith and hope are in God."

And now the Apostle summarizes his argument. Our "purification," our holiness, is by our "obedience to the truth." Remember, the Christian life is not a passive work. It's not lazy and it's

⁶ Galatians 3:13a

⁷ Ephesians 1:7

⁸ John 1:1, 2a

⁹ Revelation 1:8

not easy. God does demand obedience from us, and we obey because we've witnessed his glory and rightly respond in obedience. That obedience is manifested in "a sincere brotherly love." This is the Greek phrase *philadelphia*. Paul uses this word in Romans twelve when he says, "be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves...Practice hospitality."¹⁰ Holiness is exemplified when we "love one another earnestly from a pure heart." And again, the reason why we love this way, the reason we are called to be holy is because we "have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable." Our current lives are not endless. We each will, at one point or another, meet our mortality. But the life that God offers to us, is imperishable and eternal. Our regeneration is imperishable because it comes "through the living and abiding word of God." In God there is life and only life, because God is holy there is no death in him. Therefore, we, as adopted children, inherit that selfsame eternal life. And boy is that Good News.

Let us pray. Most Holy and Gracious Father, thank you for our adoption and our inheritance. Thank you for our regeneration. Now, we ask that the Holy Spirit continue in us a good work. O Holy Ghost, help us to obey the commands of Christ. Help us to live in righteousness, prepared and sober-minded. Help us to believe. Purify us, O God, so that we may be an offering, pleasing in your sight. Instill in us the love of Christ that passes all understanding and breaks through the barriers and chains of sin. It is in his holy and precious Name we pray. Amen.

¹⁰ Romans 12:10, 13b