

“Living Hope”
1 Peter 1:1-12
4.19.20
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
2nd Sunday of Easter
6th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic

1 Peter 1:1-12 Common English Bible (CEB)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God’s chosen strangers in the world of the diaspora, who live in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

2 God the Father chose you because of what he knew beforehand. He chose you through the Holy Spirit’s work of making you holy and because of the faithful obedience and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

May God’s grace and peace be multiplied to you.

3 May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be blessed! On account of his vast mercy, he has given us new birth. You have been born anew into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 4 You have a pure and enduring inheritance that cannot perish—an inheritance that is presently kept safe in heaven for you. 5 Through his faithfulness, you are guarded by God’s power so that you can receive the salvation he is ready to reveal in the last time.

6 You now rejoice in this hope, even if it’s necessary for you to be distressed for a short time by various trials. 7 This is necessary so that your faith may be found genuine. (Your faith is more valuable than gold, which will be destroyed even though it is itself tested by fire.) Your genuine faith will result in praise, glory, and honor for you when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Although you’ve never seen him, you love him. Even though you don’t see him now, you trust him and so rejoice with a glorious joy that is too much for words. 9 You are receiving the goal of your faith: your salvation.

10 The prophets, who long ago foretold the grace that you’ve received, searched and explored, inquiring carefully about this salvation. 11 They wondered what the Spirit of Christ within them was saying when he bore witness beforehand about the suffering that would happen to Christ and the glory that would follow. They wondered what sort of person or what sort of time they were speaking about. 12 It was revealed to them that in their search they were not serving themselves but you. These things, which even angels long to examine, have now been proclaimed to you by those who brought you the good news. They did this in the power of the Holy Spirit, who was sent from heaven.

The Word of the LORD! Thanks be to God!

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God’s chosen strangers in the world of the diaspora...

That’s a bizarre opening line. “God’s chosen strangers in the world of the diaspora.” What on earth is Peter or someone writing in Peter’s name talking about? At least with Paul we have opening lines that sound more like this:

To the churches in *insert city’s name here*, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the LORD Jesus Christ...

“God’s Chosen strangers in the world of the diaspora”? To help us understand this unexpected greeting, we must first figure out why the author of 1 Peter would write such a thing.

You’ll notice the list of areas in verse 1: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These are churches made up of predominantly Gentiles. And remember, the church started out as converts from Judaism to followers of Christ and then the Gentiles came on board. The Gentiles at this point are turning away from the Roman Empire’s worship of their emperor, who thinks he is a god, and embracing Israel’s God through Jesus Christ. Not only are these Gentiles turning away from the godless practices found in worshipping the Roman Emperor, they are probably turning away from many family members and friends. They are suffering. Now, I need to say that the suffering I am talking about is not persecution. That happens later. This suffering is the lack of seeing your family or friends again simply because they worship Rome’s gods and hold onto the practices found in Roman society and you don’t. Worshipping Rome’s gods and adhering to the behaviors saturated within Roman society are contrary to Christianity. This suffering also includes chastisement from family and former friends.

Maybe the greeting makes a little more sense now. These Gentiles, like all of the people who converted to Christianity before and after the writing of this letter, are “God’s chosen strangers”. They are living “in the world of the diaspora”.....in exile. Physically, these Christians may not be far away from their loved ones, but Spiritually, they might as well be millions of miles apart.

Peter has a lot of encouraging to do with multiple congregations across the known world. While the Christians are not feeling the violence at this point in history, they are feeling isolated. They are to be faithful in the here and now as well as in the future when Christ comes again, as hinted at in verse 7. Their faith, Peter says, is worth much more than gold and will be tested in these stressful times. And even though these converts have never seen the risen Christ, Peter is reminding them of Christ’s love for them and their love for Christ. To continue encouraging them, Peter is bringing the Gentiles back to the prophets for a moment starting in verse 10. The prophets came in another time of exile that was both spiritual and physical. The prophets spoke the truth of what was to happen, yet they couldn’t quite fully figure out what, or rather, who that truth was: Jesus Christ. Yet, those prophets ministering to people in spiritual and physical exile were given faith to continue their ministries. According to Peter, these prophets were only able to continue their faithful work through the Holy Spirit’s power.

It’s not just the Gentiles in Peter’s time who had gone through heartache. Their ancestors hundreds of years before went through it, too.

Now, when I was looking at passages to preach from for the remainder of the Great 50 days of Easter, I was drawn to 1 Peter because of the themes of exile and encouragement found throughout this letter. Because let’s face it, we feel like we are in exile right now in this global crisis. For many right now, you can’t visit your parents because they are in an assisted-living facility. For others, there are friends you aren’t able to see in person. Still, for more, you wish you could resume normal working habits with colleagues. We feel separated. We probably feel like we are in exile.....”God’s chosen strangers in the world of the diaspora” who live in Pollocksville, Maysville, Trenton, River Bend, New Bern, Swansboro, Raleigh, Columbia, TN, Denver, CO, and across the world.

Certainly, I feel somewhat exiled. And when I help record the services or do Facebook Live from my office, I am addressing loved ones from afar for your protection and mine. Obviously, our circumstances compared to our ancestors 2000 years ago are different, but the sense of

exile is real. We may very well feel like strangers in our own homes and neighborhoods, not able to do what we want when we want.

Yet, Peter encourages us through these ancient words. The Holy Spirit is still on the move, friends! The same Holy Spirit moving through the prophets in the time of the exile, moving through those early Christians in another exile, is moving right now in our COVID-19 exile. In this time of isolation, we are to still proclaim the Good News that encourages the heavy hearted, overworked, grieving, isolated, and anxious people. What's that Good News for such a time as this? Through Jesus Christ's resurrection, we "have been born anew into a living hope". This hope is not static, it is continuous and surprises us in new ways. Through Christ's faithful work in his life, death, and resurrection, we will endure.

This living hope is just that: A living hope! It wrestles, it struggles, it moves, and it triumphs because our living hope does not rest in any one of us. It rests in our living Savior because of God's work through him! And our living hope is sustained by the miraculous and awesome power of the Holy Spirit who is moving through and in us today!

Kindred in Christ, be encouraged! Remain faithful in these difficult times! Be at peace knowing the Good News of this living hope!

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.