

EASTER IV – MAY 8, 2022 – 1 PETER 2:11-20

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. ¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. ¹⁸ Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

This passage from Peter's first epistle starts with a bold assertion – that we are sojourners and strangers in a strange land, and have been ever since the fall into sin of Adam and Eve. From the original Greek, you could say, in an earthier fashion, that we are more than sojourners and exiles – we are aliens and outcasts, weird folks to the world around us. We respond to temptations and sin differently from those who don't have the hope of the Resurrection that we do; we have a different outlook on life; we have a hope that cannot be quenched, even though death, destruction, and disease

beset us and make us weak in the knees. We abstain from the pleasures of the flesh, keep ourselves pure from that which would contaminate our thoughts, and avoid that which the world says is right but God says is wrong and damaging. Most importantly, we remember that our citizenship is in heaven.

Just yesterday, we took a trip to the Post Office for a different errand than one would normally accomplish there. We went to renew Julia's passport. Nicole's and my passports are good until 2026, but because Julia's still a minor, and changes appearance on a regular basis, the regulations stipulate that children have their passports renewed every 5 years instead of 10. So, armed with our paperwork, her birth certificate, copies of our drivers' licenses, and our own presence to each attest that she was indeed our child, off we went. There are procedures put in place by the government that are certainly not harmful, and do not get in the way of practicing our Christian faith. We honor the government, because it's been set up as a way to regulate the base desires of mankind, act as a curb to violent impulses to sin, and serve a legitimate purpose among us sinful men. There's no reason to protest this real concern with verifying her identity, in case we need to travel by plane or out of the country.

However, we don't have citizenship documents for our permanent home, that of heaven with God. Even though we are sojourners and strangers here on earth, we will not remain here forever. In the words of the favorite hymn, "I'm but a stranger here; heaven is my home." Thanks be to God that this is true! Who would want to stay here on this planet forever, with the corruption and filth that surround us every day? We have a hope that cannot be quenched, a straining ahead as if we are finishing the last mile of a marathon race, for the glory of God that is about to be revealed. There are consequences of this hope that lies within us – that make our faith visible and apparent to all with whom we come into contact. These results are not the cause of our salvation, let's be clear and honest at the beginning. We are saved totally because of God's love in Christ Jesus, and for His complete and total atonement on the cross of Calvary. We don't earn points in heaven because of the good things we do, or because of the evil things that we avoid. However, there is something to be said, and you'll notice

this in the sermons for the next couple of weeks, for striving to do the things that please God, and avoid those things He hates, totally because of the love that He has shown toward us, that we reflect back toward Him. Let's talk about this new way of living a little bit this morning, and how it evidences itself in our daily activities.

Some of the directives that Peter gives here come to us as foreign, difficult, almost impossible, for us to emulate in this world. After all, we are still saints and sinners at the same time, until we are rescued from this valley of tears to God Himself in heaven. But, the Holy Spirit works within us to cause us to gradually, day by day, come to embody these positive traits in our thoughts, words, and deeds. We abstain from the sinful things of the flesh – I'm sure that you can use your imagination to come up with examples of things that we should stay away from. As I tell the Confirmation kids, we all know the situations that will cause us to be tempted more than we can bear. If you go down a dark alley, at night, alone, in a tough neighborhood of town, you shouldn't be surprised if bad things happen to you. This isn't to say that the responsibility, the blame, for the dastardly acts lies with us – we, after all, didn't commit them. However, we are given the "street smarts" to avoid those situations that are patently dangerous. That's why I instruct them to avoid being alone with someone of the opposite sex, in a circumstance that might tempt them to do things that they, if supervised, might not do.

We need to be sure that we don't go along with the ways of the sinful world in which we live, so that we can maintain a clear witness that we are different from the ways of this world. Language that we use – it's easy to lapse into the "lingo" of using the Lord's Name in vain, or asking Him to curse something that we have no intention of asking Him to do such a drastic thing. We often use words in flippant ways, asking Him to witness the truth of what we are saying, when that is the furthest thing from our minds.

Another example, which is so prevalent that we sometimes don't even notice it, is viewing things on TV and in the movies that take God's good gift of sexual relations and pervert it into something

that is sinful, shameful, outside of the bounds of marriage. There's nothing wrong with these actions – WITHIN the bounds of marriage. But, the evil one, like he so often does, turns a good gift of God into something that is something less than God intended, losing the blessings and turning it into something commonplace. We know in our own minds that this is wrong, and that God calls us to something greater than this. However, we're easily drawn in to what used to be called "smut", and that was in an era where things weren't nearly as open and obviously against God's will. Why do we abstain from these things? Because we aren't of this world; we don't agree with those who think that God doesn't care about such things; we don't live in the way of those who despise or refuse to recognize that this world is but a shadow, a pale representation of the full kingdom of God which is waiting to be revealed.

What's Peter's more overarching point? Why is it so important that we live in a way that's different from the world around us? Why is it important for us to shun the sinful ways of those who would seek to corrupt us? Why should we live as strangers in this world, oddballs even, not succumbing to the ways of those who are on their way to destruction because of their feeding of their sinful selves? Those who see us will also observe that we are different, and on the day of God's visitation, they will glorify God.

What is that "day of His visitation"? Clearest reading of Scripture – the Last Day, the Day of Judgment, the day in which Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. One could say that this was the first Advent of Christ, that those who snubbed the popular opinion of Who Jesus was and what He had come to do were certainly noticed – in fact, they were persecuted, even killed, for the faith which they would not abandon. On that "day of visitation", the Last Day, every knee will bow, every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Whether they believe in Him as their Savior and Lord, they still will bow before His power and authority. Those who refuse to believe will rise to eternal condemnation – they will be thrown into the lake of fire with the devil and his evil angels. Those who believe, however, will be ushered into eternal life, in both body and soul. There will

be weeping and gnashing of teeth for those who will not believe; but there will be joy and glorifying of God for those who are proceeding to heavenly glory, to that which we've been waiting ever since the fall into sin in Genesis chapter 3.

Those who observe us acting differently will possibly see us acting differently, be moved to ask questions as to why we're acting differently, opening the door for us to speak the reason for the hope that lies within us – Christ and His Gospel. That's one of the difficulties in living the Christian life – finding opportunities to speak the Gospel to others, to give others the hope that we have inside. If they see us reacting differently to the difficulties in life, to have hope even when it seems like things should be hopeless, to see us abstaining from that which would sully us or give us the appearance of participating in evil, then they might just ask us questions – that's what we want to have happen! It doesn't have to be an encounter that we fear, where we have to have just the right words to say or a “pat” speech prepared – rather, we can speak freely, and the Holy Spirit will provide the words for us to say

In our day and age, where we are proceeding into a “post-Christian” era, sometimes the witness that raises eyebrows is enduring persecution, disdain, scorn. We've been spoiled, folks! We've pretty much lived in a time where we are not questioned when we live lives differently from those that are not focused on the life to come – we've progressed from being in the majority to at least being in a minority that is tolerated and left alone. But, we aren't promised that this will last forever; in fact, we are told that in the Last Days, the love of many will grow cold, that we WILL be persecuted for the Name of Christ which we bear, that things will be very difficult for those who confess the Christian faith. People will notice that we are different; however, being different may not be without pain and suffering, punishment and derision.

We still live in a country where we're free to attend worship, to speak the Name of Christ publicly, without fear of reprisal, to advocate for changes in society to better reflect the values and

tenets that we hold dear. However, historically, this is an anomaly! Remember that all of the disciples, with the possible exception of Judas, who hanged himself, and John, who died an exile on the island of Patmos, were martyred for the faith. I'm not saying that we will be killed for the Christian faith – I don't know that. But, we need to be prepared for the possibility that the culture could shift even further, and we could be despised for not "getting with the program", watering down the faith, or even abandoning it in favor of whatever the greater culture demands. Sound silly? Follow the news – the civil authorities in Finland tried to jail a writer and a bishop for presenting the truth of God's creation of man and woman, rather than a free-flowing definition that changes with one's feelings. This was labeled as hate speech; even though the truth prevailed, the appeals aren't over yet...that's in Finland, not in some backwater dictatorship!

Suffice it to say, Peter's directives in this passage resonate even today, in the post-Christian culture in which we live. Things certainly aren't better now than they were in Peter's time! We are directed by Peter to keep ourselves pure from temptations to sin; avoid obviously sinful ways of life; do this not because we think we're going to merit heavenly glory, but out of gratitude and love for what Christ has already done FOR US on the cross. We live in this world, but aren't of it; we obey the king and secular government as long as it doesn't violate our Christian faith or the clear Word of the Scriptures. We look forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness and truth. Therefore, we have a different outlook, perspective, and attitude toward this world – we are citizens of heaven, sojourning (or living as expatriates – those who aren't permanent citizens, but temporary residents – here on earth).

This does not mean, however, that our lives are meaningless as far as this world is concerned. We serve as witnesses, testifying to the truth through our daily living. Hopefully, and with the working of the Holy Spirit, will have people listen to our deeds as well as our words, and start asking questions of how we can live as people of hope, in a world that doesn't have much of a reason to hope anymore.

Thanks be to God for His guidance, His love, and His provision. He works through His Means of Grace to continue to lead us, direct us, and nourish us with the pure spiritual food and spiritual drink – the fruits of His sacrifice on the cross. He has truly done everything for our salvation. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.