

<sup>17</sup> If you appeal to the Father who judges impartially according to each one's work, you are to conduct yourselves in reverence during your time living as strangers. <sup>18</sup> For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb. <sup>20</sup> He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was revealed in these last times for you. <sup>21</sup> Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

<sup>22</sup> Since you have purified yourselves by your obedience to the truth,<sup>[e]</sup> so that you show sincere brotherly love for each other, from a pure<sup>[f]</sup> heart love one another constantly,<sup>[g]</sup> <sup>23</sup> because you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God. <sup>24</sup> For

All flesh is like grass,  
and all its glory like a flower of the grass.  
The grass withers, and the flower falls,  
<sup>25</sup> but the word of the Lord endures forever.<sup>[h]</sup>

And this word is the gospel that was proclaimed to you.

### Be Afraid

Grace Lutheran School, my first elementary school, was a uniform school. They made children dress up in shirt, slacks, and a tie, every day. Believe it or not they intended to teach children like this. Not only was it uncomfortable but they also had an awkward scoring system that played out like golf. The lower your score the better you did. If however, you gained a sufficient number of points or demerits as they liked to call them, you would win detention. Do that enough times and you were granted a visit to the principle's office, where a nicely warmed paddle waited. How many points I earned, I can't recall, but I do remember sitting, passing my time in fear. So is that how Peter imagines us passing our time here in reverent fear as foreigners? Waiting to be called into the principle's office did start to feel like home after a while. Peter isn't speaking about passing our time in fear of an angry God, waiting to receive a wallop because we've accrued too many points.

The fear Peter has in mind is more like another childhood memory. I had saved up all of my lawn mowing money, birthday money, and Christmas money so that I could buy a GameBoy. It was my most precious and costly treasure and during the winter freezing rains of Portland I walked fearfully, treading gingerly, so that I wouldn't slip, fall, and break it. It was costly, important, and handled with care. That's passing time in reverent fear.

Peter gives us a reason to tread carefully in reverent fear around our God. Yes he is our Father an impartial Judge. He is powerful. He is just. He is God. While there are plenty of reasons to be afraid there is one reason we are told, "Don't be afraid."

But first Peter insults us and points out our former way of life, handed down by our fathers, is quite useless, empty, void, futile, like a uniform school with a scoring system for misbehaving. It's literally handed on down by your fathers. Peter takes a swipe not only at the current actions of these people but also their fathers. Peter is known as the apostle who just blurts out answers. He gets to the point. He sometimes says foolish things like, "*Quick let's build three shelters. One for you. One for Moses. One for Elijah.*" "*Lord, if it's you,*" Peter answered him, "*command me to come to you on the water.*" Peter is blunt and to the point. But here he insults his audience. Those he's never met before by telling them the truth. What you once were so concerned about is nothing. It's perishing.

You have something so much more precious than what your parents have handed down to you. You were redeemed, not with something perishable like gold or silver (some of the most enduring things we have in this world) but with the precious blood of Christ. He has been revealed to you, so that you believe in him. Born again eternally through the living and enduring Word of God.

But it doesn't look like they are living and acting as if this new life is all that important. Maybe they don't realize all that God has done for them. Last week I said, this could be a post baptism sermon that was delivered when those baptized were brought into the church. Peter has to warn them that *The father judges impartially according to*

*each ones work.* And that we are to live in reverent fear during our time on earth living as strangers. *In reverence is emphatic position.* It's meant to stand out but in reverence sounds like a weak translation.

Peter insults us as well just before our lesson he says, "*be sober-minded and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" <sup>14</sup> *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance.* <sup>15</sup> *But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct;* <sup>16</sup> *for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.*<sup>[d]</sup>" He refers to our former way of life as drunken, disobedient, and ignorant. I'd say that accurately describes my childhood. I wasn't obedient.

And our way of life was not sustainable. It was empty. No matter how hard we might try we'll still slow down. Knees still wear out. Our eyes grow weak. We get tired and die. That was previously but now you are a new creation, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Now, you've been redeemed from your former way of life in which you were enslaved to sin and the devil. You had to serve him. This has been accomplished though the living and enduring word of God. Or we could deny the value of Christ's death and live like there is no change. We can deny the power of the resurrection, the reality to which you've been restored, the power of his Word and the Holy Spirit at work in it. We can deny that and live like there is no change and continue to live in the prison that we've been set free from. Peter is saying, "Don't live like you used to. Live according to the Spirit." Why? For one thing God will judge.

Maybe that doesn't bother us. What are we afraid of instead? Fitting in, popularity, the world around us. We are instructed to be afraid of only one thing. Fear, love, and trust in God alone not the futile and empty way of life. That means we are to conform our lives to his will and not the other way around. We shouldn't be redefining the definition of marriage, gender, or roles. To do so simply displays our cowardice to hide beliefs and fear them above God. God not concerned about popularity. He is concerned with Life and death. We are commanded to not be afraid of sickness, poverty, death, anything in the past or present. You are not to be afraid of these things. Rather you are to fear God above all things. Because we are sinners standing before a just God who must punish sin. We are receiving the just punishment for the demerits we've earned. It's not a paddle. It's death that haunts us all.

Be afraid? We should be terrified. But Peter also gives us a reason not to be afraid. Who do we find when we look at God? Jesus: telling us, "*Don't be afraid.*" *I have redeemed you. You are mine.*

Everything changes even our fear but God's Word is unchanging. Peter quotes from Isaiah 40, "*The grass withers, the flowers fall, but the Word of our God stands forever.*" All things in this world perish, spoil, and fade. Hair and teeth fall out. But God's Word doesn't change. We have his promise and that will not change. We have his Word and that will not change. He gives us his Body and Blood to assure us that nothing has changed and you still have no reason to be afraid. Look at what he has given you. We receive his unchanging promise, the blood of the lamb for the forgiveness of our sins.

Because of this there is a change in us. We were ransomed or redeemed from the former useless way of life. Redemption takes us back to slavery and buying someone back instead of being sold off into slavery. Now-a-days we use that word with coupons. When you take a coupon into the grocery store, they redeem them from you. You were holding those coupons captive and that's when the store bought them back from you via a discount on your groceries. But God didn't redeem you with a discount. He bought you back from abusive slavery to the Devil, sin, and death. They held you captive and he bought you back with his own blood. The sinless lamb of God for the sinful.

He then tells us, "This old Lord, no longer has any claim on you." You are ransomed. You are changed. You are entirely passive and God does the acting. He does the saving. It's said the indicative always precedes the

imperative. That means the facts of scripture come before the commands. The cart always follows the horse. The facts come first. The gospel motivation, the good news comes first, telling you what's been done for you. Christ died, redeemed, and rose for you so that you can be set free and live with him eternally. That is our hope. The Christian hope is always based on facts, a past fact that is firmly founded in the resurrection of Jesus.

Don't be afraid. Rather continue as a child of God, redeemed, restored, forgiven. Treat this gift as something precious, near and dear to you. Remember the gift God has given you and then share it with others. Because it's a past act. "You were redeemed." It isn't something that you have to try and earn. It's already been done. Just as we confess in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Apostles Creed, "*He has redeemed you a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won you from sin, death, the power of the devil, not with Gold or silver but with the holy precious blood, the innocent suffering and death.*"

Because of this, and because you know this, you are judged according to your works in Christ. You are purified in Christ by your obedience to the truth. You now show that truth in your life through love for one another *because you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God.*

Walk in reverent fear, be afraid? No, be reverent? Sure that helps. This precious gift is from above. You don't need to be afraid of it, that's what Peter told us last week. Nobody can take it, steal it, break it, nor will it wear out. This gift is kept in heaven for you. So that no matter what may happen, even if you slip and break your GameBoy, or even if you find yourself in a waiting room in a school that still practiced corporal punishment into the 90's we have a gift that can't be taken. Don't be afraid. It is finished. The one who lived, died, rose, and redeemed you says, "Don't be afraid."

Amen.