

Easter 3 / April 23, 2023

1 Peter 1:21

“So that your faith and hope are in God.”

Peter’s letter to the Gentile believers in Asia Minor was occasioned in part by a persecution they were experiencing for the sake of their faith in Christ, crucified and raised from the dead. The fiery trial came as a surprise. They hadn’t expected such a violent reaction from their neighbours. Why would something that gave them such spiritual peace and joy, provoke such anger and cause them such suffering? When people come to faith in Christ the response of family and friends is not always positive. Family and friends who are not believers, sometimes become defensive, as if by implication there is something defective in their character. Some people are apprehensive as to how the person’s newfound faith will affect their relationship. Some people become hostile when new believers change their lifestyle and no longer engage in certain activities.

Life was often difficult for Gentile believers in the first centuries. Pagan society revolved around the worship of the Roman gods. Many community activities were accompanied by rituals associated with those gods. Gentile believers were marked for hostility when they would not participate in those community rituals, which included sacrifices to the gods and to Caesar as a son of the gods. This was particularly problematic for Christians, because these sacrifices were seen as promoting the welfare of the community. More seriously, sacrifice to Caesar was a pledge of allegiance to the Roman State. Christians were considered atheists, because they wouldn’t worship the state gods. They were considered trouble makers and disturbers of the peace, because they wouldn’t go along with the crowd. Similar attitudes are being expressed about Christians today and its only going to get worse.

How should we respond when we are grieved by trials for the sake of Christ? We need to be proactive and realize that the world view and the Christian view are not in harmony and becoming more disparate. We shouldn’t be surprised when the society responds to Christian beliefs and values with hostility. Most importantly, we need to turn to God for strength and rely on Him for help. Our faith and hope are in God. Thirdly, we need to see our sufferings as sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and respond not with our own hostility, but by witnessing to His love, remembering that on the cross He prayed for the forgiveness of His tormentors. Our Faith and hope are in God for the sake of Christ our Saviour.

Peter prepares us for hostility for the sake of Christ, by teaching that our faith is deepened by our continuous use of the word. It was through the word and by the working of the Holy Spirit that we received rebirth through faith in Christ. Peter writes, “you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” The word is our sword, shield and armour, by which we withstand the fiery darts of the evil one. The word informs us as to the mind of Christ, so we know God’s will as to the manner in which we conduct our lives; what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in His sight. The word empowers our faith, through it the Holy Spirit continually draws us closer to the heart of God’s love in Christ. The word enlightens our minds, so we know how to respond in a Godly manner and give a good witness when we are called to give an account of our faith in Christ and the hope we have in Him.

There is nothing more powerful and effective as God’s word. By His word, God called all things into being. Through His Word, God holds all things in existence. By the power of His word and through the working of the Holy Spirit, God opens our hearts to receive Jesus and gives us faith to believe in Him as our Lord and Saviour. God sustains our faith, gives it growth, development and expression through the power of His word; spoken, written, received under the forms of water, bread and wine in baptism and Holy Communion. The most important thing we can do as believers is to be in the word. The word of the Lord endures forever. Those who endure through the word will live forever. The word is the power of God by which our faith will be preserved until it receives fulfillment in our share of Christ’s resurrection. Our faith and hope are in God through the power of His mighty word.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus ascended bodily into heaven on the 40th day of His resurrection, but He promised to remain with believers through the Spirit and the word. He remains in the world through believers, who are now His body on earth. The church on earth is body of Christ, by which He continues to dwell in the world and through which He expresses His presence in all the earth. Through the Church, the Holy Spirit proclaims the gospel of forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation with God through faith in Christ. Through the voice of the Church, the Holy Spirit calls people living in the darkness of sin and spiritual death, to arise to newness of life through faith in Christ. The word of God that called all things into

being, which took on flesh in Jesus of Nazareth and that opened our hearts to believe, is now in the hearts and on the lips of believers who proclaim it throughout the earth to family, friends and community members.

Sometimes people receive the word in faith with rejoicing. Sometimes people cast the word aside as something worthless. Sometimes people both reject the word and turn on the people who shared it with them. Nevertheless, the word of the Lord endures forever. Those who receive the word with faith have new life with God in Christ. Those who endure in the word will have life forever in the resurrection of Christ. Z The word is never without effect. The word never returns to God empty. It always creates faith in the hearts of some who hear. It will produce a harvest of eternal life in those who take it to heart and believe it. We are blessed to believe the word. We are privileged to share the word with our lips and lives. Pray God that we may abide in the word, even if it should cause us suffering. Our faith and hope are in God. God's word will produce a harvest of eternal life in those who believe and abide in it to the end.

Christians in the first centuries received strength to endure suffering and were encouraged in hardship, by abiding in the word as communities in Christ. We experience the power of the living, abiding word of God in our fellowship as Christians. When first century believers were ostracized by their families and friends and excluded by the communities in which they lived, as atheists, haters of humankind and disturbers of the peace, they found community and experienced family love in their fellowship with each other. This is why Peter pleads with us to "love one another earnestly from a pure heart." This is why the author of Hebrews warns us against giving up the habit of meeting together. The church is the body of Christ and each part needs the others for support and encouragement in faith and hope. Believers find Christ and experience His presence as they gather together around the word.

Jesus is the Word. He speaks words of forgiveness and life. He is present among us through the word. He said, "where two or three are gathered in my name I am there with them." Christians gather as communities of believers, because Jesus the living and abiding Word of God, is present in our fellowship as believers. This is why it is essential for believers to gather for worship, prayer, study and fellowship. In these communal gatherings Christ is present through His Spirit, to build up our faith, encourage our spirits, comfort us in our troubles. Through word Christ reminds us our faith and hope are in God.

Our faith and hope are in God through Christ our Saviour. He opens our hearts to believe through the imperishable, living word of God. Because our faith and hope are in God, we are empowered to love one another earnestly from pure hearts. Because our faith and hope are in God, we are empowered to witness Christ to the community and to our family and friends, by speaking the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus' name, Because our faith and hope are in God, we are empowered to witness to Christ by the manner in which we live, especially by the way we deal with hardship and suffering. Our faith and hope are in God. By the power of His holy word we abide in Him, awaiting the fulfillment of faith in our share of His resurrection to everlasting life. God in love keep us to that day. In Jesus' Name. Amen