

1 Peter 1

I want to start by sharing stories of 3 catholic priests – so apologies that they are all men, but that’s how it goes...

The first is Fr Mychael Judge – he was the first to die on 9/11 – a fire service chaplain (as I am) he responded to the unfolding crisis, providing support and pastoral care until he died early on in the attacks on the world trade center 20 years ago.

The second is Fr Jerome Sequeria – he and other members of his community have been working providing aid for many years in Afghanistan and wasn’t evacuated. He writes ‘Thank you for your continuous prayers for our safety. The way the situation is changing in the country, it is anyone’s imagination ... safety does not make sense here. It is a chaotic situation.’

The third is Father David Palmer – he was chaplain designate at Nottingham University, until the university discovered he held traditional catholic views on a number of issues including abortion and euthanasia amongst others, at which point he was barred from the post.

As we begin our preaching series on 1 Peter, I wonder which of these situations is closest to the situation the small congregations of the nascent church that Peter wrote to? And which echo our own experience of living as sojourners in this world on our way to heaven?

Thankfully most of us are not faced with constant danger in our daily work, but let’s not forget to pray for those who are. The situation in Afghanistan and many other parts of the world continues to be perilous for Christian believers facing daily persecution and death. However, the growing little bits of hostility, maligned and misunderstood and a growing sense that Christianity is no longer generally accepted because of what we believe and how we are called to live brings us into a close relationship with the 1st century believers to whom Peter wrote, and we would do well to read and study this letter, standing firm and staying joyful in the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

If you have a bible near you, please turn to 1 Peter chapter 1 – page 1217 in the church bibles.

- 1) 1-2 Elect exiles
- 2) 3-5 Promises and treasures
- 3) 6-12 Joy in suffering

1-2. Elect exiles. Have you ever felt you don’t belong? Maybe you’ve gone to a party wearing the wrong clothes, or maybe visited a place you’re not used to. One example given at homegroup last Wednesday was visiting a betting shop, though several of us spoke about how we had such experience due to parents who had a gambling habit. But that’s not quite the image Peter presents. He describes the people he’s writing to as 1) Chosen by God – as are all Christian believers, not because of anything we’ve done, but because of Jesus – let’s not forget who’s writing these words – Simon Peter – the one Jesus called from his life of fishing to sharing in the mission of God, Simon Peter who often put his foot in it, the one

who denied Jesus at the moment of Jesus greatest need, the one restored to relationship and commissioned to equip those early Christians to follow Jesus more closely. That's the elect, chosen people we are, full of failings and faults. Peter then described them as scattered, scattered throughout parts of modern day Turkey; exiles – not because they've left home, though that might be true of some, but because their calling of following Jesus means that society around no longer accepted them as they lived out a radical lifestyle of holiness, just as the people of God did in the Old testament many centuries before. Peter had, of course, heard Jesus say (John 15:18-19) 'if the world hates you, remember the world first hated me, I chose you out of the world'. We are foreigners in a hostile land (just like those priests in Afghanistan), a people presently living in exile, on our way home, dispersed in the world. How is this so? What makes us unique as Christians? We worship one God, we base our morals revealed in Holy Scripture, and so we might stand out as different, even strange. Therefore we might rightly suffer for doing right, and we are called to stand firm in the face of suffering. So we might need to be encouraged, which is where Peter next turns

3-5 Promises and treasures. Imagine you're just heard great news, maybe that a loved one has received a clear diagnosis from illness, you've got good marks in an exam, your daughter's announced his engagement? You're full of joy, praise, thanksgiving. So too here. Praise – worship. Verse 3-13 are one continuous sentence in the original Greek, but the main phrase is the one we looked at last week- verse 3 – blessed be the God and father of our lord Jesus Christ! Peter in verse 3-5 shows us why that is so, what the good news is – God is worthy of praise because of what he has done – he has granted us new birth into a living hope through Jesus's resurrection. The result of this is an imperishable, lasting, inheritance that is now kept in heaven, and that God is able, willing to guard us safely until that time when we see him face to face in eternity. These verses contain wonderful promises that we can return to in difficult times, and they contain amazing truths that inspire us to worship, to give thanks, to be filled with joy in and through the circumstances we find ourselves in. Let's just spend a bit more time unpacking these verses before we move on...

- a) Born again into a living hope – at our (human)birth we inherit genes from both parents – but that's not all - we take on ethnicity, socio-economic identity, and citizenship too. So too when we follow Jesus our born againness brings a new identity and citizenship
- b) Imperishable inheritance – stories over the last few weeks from Afghanistan speak of people leaving behind all sorts of possessions, even family members. Here Peter says there are things we won't leave behind. Just like the people of God in the old Testament had been promised a land so too us as Christians. We leave behind what we see around us, and look ahead to an inheritance kept in heaven – a new kingdom where Christ reigns and rules. Our future will make even the finest moments of our lives here pale in comparison. Spiritually speaking we are homeless here on earth we have a future eternal inheritance that will never lose its tarnish.
- c) Guarded by his power. I wonder what it would be like to have a bodyguard? Someone who looked out for you 24/7, keeping you safe? God doesn't promise to keep us free from trouble or danger, as we know, but he does promise to keep us safe eternally – he keeps watch over our spiritual life. The greatest threat to perseverance is unbelief, lack of trust in God. Even if we waver, give that wavering to God, remember what you one experienced and knew of him. Trust in this

promise that by his power, not ours, God guards our faith so that no trial or suffering we might now face will cause us to lose it. God knows what threatens our faith, focus again on Jesus – see the great power at work in Jesus resurrection. No wonder Peter says ‘blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

6-12 Joy in suffering. As we look at the third bit of our passage today we are challenged by this apparent contradiction – joy in suffering. Suffering will come, it is inevitable as we live in this imperfect world. How we respond to it is what matters. I wonder, though, if our generally comfortable life, challenged though it has been over these last 18 months in all sorts of ways, might make us react differently? Our first response to suffering might be surprise – we do have rights, after all? Maybe we’ll become angry and fight back, either in prayer or by taking legal action? Perhaps we’ve have a tendency toward hopelessness and fall into despair? Or it could be that we react like the ostrich – to bury our heads in the sand thinking that if we simply ignore pain and problems, they will go away? All this might be our reaction, and might well be the reasonable reaction of friends, neighbours and family who’ve not yet discovered the hopeful inheritance on Jesus we thought about earlier. How can we best use the words here in scripture to inform our response when suffering comes? In verses 6-9 Peter offers us a way. First he poses a question – where is your joy? Admittedly, joy is not the first thought in the face of suffering. Yet, joy in suffering is a constant new testament theme – matt 5:12, col 1:11, 1 Thess 1:6, James 1:2 – what possible reasons could there be to rejoice in the midst of suffering? Now, let’s not get this wrong. Peter isn’t encouraging us to rejoice in the suffering itself. Suffering reminds us of the mess the world is in, its imperfections, its evils. So just what is Peter suggesting we do?

Remember that v6 is part of this one long sentence from v3-12. He wants us to focus backwards (v3) and to rejoice in who we are in Christ and in what there is in the future hope. The problem is that we often are tempted to find our joy in so many other things, and to live a roller coaster life. If our joy is rooted in the stock market, remember that share prices can go down as well as up! If joy is rooted in a particular human relationship, remember that the person we love is human and so prone to failure. If our joy is in social standing, it will rise and fall as others judge us, accept or reject us. If in the british weather – well, what can I say! Why do we do this to ourselves? Peter reminds us where true joy is found. In God the Father and the graceful salvation he offers In Jesus, applied through the ongoing person of the Holy Spirit’s life in us. Knowing and living this truth gives us a constant mooring in the fluctuations of our life. If you haven’t yet discovered this for yourself, drop me an email and let’s talk about how you can know Jesus. Hope in Jesus means we can know who we are, where we are heading, and all this never shifts. With such joy, we can be armed to face whatever suffering we might experience in this life as Christians. Peter, though, is also a realist, He (v6) knows that we feel, experience, grief and distress. The bible teaches us how to grieve and how to express sadness with hope. Have a look at the psalms, or at Jesus facing the death of his friend Lazarus.

Finally, for today, our suffering has a purpose. Our suffering is not capricious, an accident, it is designed to help us and to grow us, just (v7) as gold is purified through the furnace.

Time travel, whether it's back to the future, HG wells, or Dr who, remains a popular idea. If there is any time in history you'd like to live in, I wonder when it would be? Surely times have been better than ours – maybe for some we might want to travel back to 2019 and stay there! Travelling back to a better time? Maybe to the time of Jesus – yes, it would be great to sit at his feet, to listen to him and be close to him – but we'd also be living under oppressive roman rule, often in poverty and famine. The reality is that here and now we live in privileged times. We live in a time of fulfilment – certainly difficult times to be a Christian, when the church seems irrelevant and God may appear distant or even silent, but that's not how Peter sees it – v10 – the prophets looked forward to a time such as ours; they looked forward to a time such as ours when the promised one of God, Jesus, lived and loved, died and rose again, a time when God sent his spirit onto all people, young and old, men and women, poor and rich, a time when ethnic divisions for believers are irrelevant because of the unity of us being Christian brothers and sisters.

Whoever we are, whatever our life is like, if we trust Jesus Christ, then even the great heroes of long ago, would have gladly have time travelled to today!

Ever wanted to be an angel? To live close to the throne of God, to be sent on errands by God as his angelic messengers?, to see and know all they do? To conclude in (v12) even the angels wish for what we can have and experience in Jesus. They can only long to look at God's grace poured out on us underserving humanity. They do not know what it's like to experience the relief of sins forgiven, yet we do.

No matter how hard life can get, how oppressive society around may get towards Christian believers or how discriminatory someone at work might become, we are privileged to be alive today living as we do in a time when Christ has been revealed. No matter what we may lose in this life and however much we might suffer because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we are more privileged that either prophets or angels.

V3 we learned last week – here it is again – did you learn it – if not, bible or just listen, take it it and make it your own...