

What's your anchor? A sermon preached at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC on May 14, 2017 by Rev. Herb Hilder

Lessons; I PETER 1:8-12
JOHN 20:26-31

Sometimes in preparation for Sunday morning sermons,
Just reading the text, praying about it is like finding one's way through fog.

It is not clear,

It is disorienting, it is confusing...

The causes of the fogginess can be noise, busyness and hurry around me,

It can also be I am trying to force the text in a direction it is not supposed to go or reading too much or not enough into it.

My solution has never been –just pick another story or text – that's too easy.

My first way of rethinking through a particular passage in scripture is to read it in a version I do not normally use.

As I cannot read the Biblical languages of Hebrew or Greek – another story....

My preferred "other version" is Eugene Peterson's the Message.

The Christian community owes a great debt to Peterson for the Message has introduced a

generation or re-introduced a generation of people to the Good News – the Gospel of Jesus Christ Peterson’s version reminds us very clearly what the Bible has always been – a great story of our God’s relationship and dealings with his people.

Often we forget that and think the scriptures are for others in another time.

Nope – our story....

So this morning let me read to you the same passage that Wayne read but from The Message.

⁹ You never saw him, yet you love him. You still don’t see him, yet you trust him—with laughter and singing. Because you kept on believing, you’ll get what you’re looking forward to: total salvation.

¹⁰⁻¹² The prophets who told us this was coming asked a lot of questions about this gift of life God was preparing. The Messiah’s Spirit let them in on some of it—that the Messiah would experience suffering, followed by glory. They clamored to know who and when. All they were told was that they were serving you, you who by orders from heaven have now heard for yourselves—through the Holy Spirit—the Message of those prophecies fulfilled. Do you realize how fortunate you are? Angels would have given anything to be in on this!

For me, reading and re-reading Peterson's words, suddenly the imposed fog of the version I usually use lifted.

What Peter is continuing to outline to his readers then and now is the need for encouragement and hope.

For there is a violent and systematic attack on believers in the person of Jesus Christ.

Peter's first audience is finding it increasingly difficult to live out their faith in the Risen Lord.

Even today, it is not easy being a Christian is it?

We are surrounded by indifference or apathy about the ways of Jesus.

We are often termed irrelevant, sort of the water boys or water girls in the game of life,
Throw backs to a different age and time.

The teachings of Jesus are too often seen as one of many collections of ways to live – a collection from which we can pick the stuff we like and ignore the stuff we find uncomfortable.

Rather than THE WAY.

And when we say that, we are called exclusive, restrictive even arrogant.

Yet Peter is unapologetic in his letter is he not.
There are some basic givens that we must try to remember,
Particularly in suffering and trying times,
As well as in the good times.

Vs.8-9

Our focus must always remain on Jesus.

Not Jesus as an abstract figure, concept or idea.

Not Jesus as only an historical figure about which some select people wrote.

No, Jesus the person.

Our faith rises and falls on our personal relationship to the Risen Christ.

*The one who said and says **You did not choose me, but I chose you.***

Christianity then is not just a book of rules and regulations.

It is founded, sustained and fed by hope in our relationship with the person of Jesus Christ.

Peter had seen Jesus face to face,

Most, if not all of his first audience of this letter had not

Peter had known Christ intimately.

Most of his readers had never met anyone who had seen Jesus in the flesh.

Here Peter says, seeing, while wonderful is not as important as in faith, believing in the person of Jesus Christ.

For not all who saw Jesus in the flesh came to believe in him.

But as Jesus says in the light of his appearance and challenge to Thomas

**Have you believed because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have
come to believe. (Jn 20:29)**

Peter is telling his readers then and now, Jesus is always with us even if we cannot see him. Belief in Jesus is not about optics, rather it is about faith.

Many of you know the name of the late 19th century hymn writer, Fanny Crosby.

Born in 1820,

Miss Crosby became blind at the age of 6 weeks, owing to an eye infection and a botched medical treatment.

During her lifetime (she lived to be 95), she wrote over 9,000 hymns, including Blessed Assurance, Safe in the Arms of Jesus and He Hadeeth my Soul.

When asked if she regretted her blindness she answered

“No, thanks to my blindness, the first thing I’ll see is the face of my beloved Savior welcoming me to His heaven.”

What a wonderfully inspiring full of hope viewpoint

It does not ignore, trivialize or make light of physical suffering – in this case physical blindness. Rather it reminds us of the power of faith – to hold securely to promises and givens, even though we

may only catch glimpses of the fulfillment of promises in this life

Peter's first readers then are called to love Jesus and to trust Him,

Not because they have physically seen him (Optics),
But because they know by faith that the person of Jesus Christ is very real and present all the time (perception)

Someday, we shall see Jesus face to face
He will stand before us, as present as I stand before you now

That underlies Peter's words and conviction
Someday...the suffering, the pain, the tears, the upset, the disorientation, the dislocation of this world and in our lives shall end
And Jesus will stand before us.

In the meantime, Peter challenges his readers – hold in faith to the person of Jesus Christ and all his promises fulfilled by the Resurrection.

Second thing to remember. *God's action in Jesus Christ was not a spur of the moment or a chance event. It has its roots in the dawn of time,*

Read the Genesis account of what God promises for the serpent (Gen 3:14-15)

In time there will be One who will bring the people back into a right relationship with God that was lost in Eden.

It is certainly and long and up and down journey and it is still going on by the way.

But the big push forward by God was in the sending of His Son Jesus as a small baby to dwell among us as one of us, but without sin.

It was in God's action through Jesus that the way back to a right relationship to God was made possible but at a price – Jesus death on a Cross And secured by Jesus' Resurrection.

Until the return of Jesus or our own deaths, we live in a sort of interim period ofNOT FULLY COMPLETE YET, BUT SOMEDAY....

All of this is put forward to Peter's readers in verse 10-12.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the One long promised, long expected, long hoped for in the Old Testament – especially by writers like Isaiah.

History then is going someplace – it is not random or without meaning

Peter is one of the first post resurrection writers to open his audience's eyes and minds to see Jesus as not only the promised Messiah of the Old Testament but also as the Lord of glory.

In your suffering Peter says to his first audience, never, never ever forget that the promises and plans of God are not random or accidental.

They are purposeful.

And then Peter then adds a delightful image.

One does not catch it as quickly in the New Revised Standard version as you do in Eugene Peterson's The Message

**. Do you realize how fortunate you are?
Angels would have given anything to be in
on this**

Good folk, good listeners, you are the heirs to the full message of the prophets.

Even the angels are inquisitive.

The image of angels straining to see into the mysteries of God's actions in Jesus

They peer as it were over the battlements of heaven to behold what God has done in Jesus Christ.

Marvelous image

Remember that no matter what is happening around you,

What you are about to face,

What you dread may happen

About what you are anxious or fearful

God's plan, purpose, promises for us have greater leverage than anything of this world

Just as the Creation had its origin solely in God's creative will,

So the same God holds us through whatever we face and must endure.

Yes, there will be and is suffering in this world.

God's people will not escape it.

But know this says Peter, your faith in the person and presence of the Risen Christ will sustain each of us, Help us to hang on through grim, chaos, confusion.