

Sunday, May 28, 2017

St. Giles' Presbyterian Church

Practice the Kingdom Way

1 Peter 1: 13-25

Good morning St. Giles'! It's so good to be back with you again.

About a month ago, the Rev. Herb Hilder and I began to chat about me coming to fill in for pulpit supply at St Giles'. Herb sent me a the preaching schedule and in it, I found out that we at St. Giles' would be doing a seven week series on 1 Peter.

This morning, we'll be digging into the Scriptures and we'll be taking a look at 1 Peter, chapter 1. In this chapter, we'll see that the author is writing to the newborn, early church and that the tone of this letter is written as an encouragement to live our lives in Christ differently.

This is important for us today as well. We live in a world that calls us to live a certain way. The world prioritizes things like power, honour and glory above all else. Yet, the scriptures teach us that all power, honour and glory belongs to God alone. So how do we live out our lives differently? We'll find out this morning.

But, before we do that, let's open up our time with a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for gathering us, your people together for this time of worship. Holy Spirit, open our eyes to the truths that you have in store for us that we find your Word. Christ our Lord, we pray that you would teach us, not only why we should live our lives differently, but how we ought to practice our faith in a way that brings all power, honour and glory to the Father. This we pray in your name. Amen.

Practice:

About a week ago, I received a text message from a very good friend of mine, asking whether or not I'd be free for coffee this past Thursday. And when I got this text message, I got really excited because this friend of mine is someone that is also a friend to St. Giles'. This friend of mine is the Rev. Steve Filyk who was the youth pastor here at St. Giles'. We were chatting about this and Steve Told me that he lived in Prince George from 1998 – 2001. The Rev. Filyk is now the lead pastor at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Kamloops.

Steve's visit though was very short, and he was only visiting Prince George for about 24 hours. And the reason for this is because he was visiting Prince George as the padre to the Rocky Mountain Rangers who's B company is stationed right here in our city.

When we were texting back and forth planning out the details of our coffee, I at one point suggested that we might go for breakfast. He texted back saying that he

wouldn't be able to do breakfast because B Company had breakfast scheduled for 7:30am and that he had to be there. I told him no problem, and that we would meet later in the morning for coffee when he had some spare time.

As I reflected on this short exchange of text messages, I thought to myself how structured the military is. As part of the military, you have set times for certain things to be done. You also have certain responsibilities that you had to tend to. And even if you didn't FEEL like doing those things, you always had to remember that this was something that you had signed up for.

Now of course, these regimented schedules take time to get used to. And with practice, doing things within the boundaries of the military become easier and easier.

As I've taken more and more time thinking about this illustration, the whole thing has resonated with me. And the reason that I say that is the word "practice" has been percolating in my mind for the last little while. "Practice" is one of the words that we hear often, but it's a word that we really don't give too much thought towards.

When I was growing up, when I heard the word "practice", I would always cringe. The reason for this is because for me, "practice" equated to "piano". Yes, I was one of those kids who was forced to play the piano. In fact, I played the piano up to

grade 10. I took private lessons from various teachers and my mother even sent me to lessons at the Royal Conservatory of Music at the University of Toronto.

But, when I think about the piano, I always cringed. It was painful for me, because practice took time. It was hours of practicing how to play the piano in order that I would be able to enter into competitions and complete my piano exams. Practice for me was painful.

But the word practice has been percolating in my mind for the last little while. Why? Because practice is a tool that helps us in the long run. What do I mean by that?

**[SLIDE: VINCE CARTER]**



A few weeks ago, I was watching an interview with Vince Carter. For those of you who don't know, Vince Carter is a professional basketball player AND he played for the Toronto Raptors from 1998 – 2004. Growing up in Toronto Vince was an important part of the Toronto franchise, and a big reason why I fell in love with the game of basketball. But, the interview with Vince Carter was eye opening because, in that interview, he was asked about his time in college.

Vince Carter went to the University of North Carolina and he played under the legendary coach, Dean Smith. At his time at North Carolina, Vince had some growing pains. His style of play in basketball was all about power and dunking and flash. And when he dunked the ball, he would taunt his opponents. For Dean Smith, this wasn't the way. North Carolina basketball was all about class. In fact, Coach Smith had a quote that says, "A lion never roars after a kill." For Vince to be dunking the ball and then taunt his opponents, he was pulled aside and coached that this was not the **Carolina Way**.

The Carolina Way is an interesting way of framing the kind of style and play that Coach Smith had envisioned for his team.

And I wonder if it isn't the same way for the church as well. How do we practice our faith so that we can live out the Kingdom Way?

Our sermon this morning is called “Practice the Kingdom Way” and we’ll discover for ourselves what it means to be the kind of people that Christ calls us to be.

The book of First Peter is one that was written a long long time ago in a place that was quite different than the world that we live today. As far as scholars can tell, the book of First Peter was written after the death and resurrection of Jesus. And, in fact, the letter is written to the early church that was established as the good news of the gospel was being spread across the Roman Empire.

Some scholars reject that First Peter was written by Peter himself. And the reason for this is because some of the evidence that is presented in the scriptures point out that it was written in AD 81.

Peter himself died under the reign of Emperor Nero between AD 54 and AD 68. Some scholars instead believe that the author uses Peter as a pseudonym, which was common practice in those days.

None the less, the book of First Peter is important because it addresses the early church and it deals with some of the issues in which the larger early church was dealing with.

The issues that the book of First Peter addresses was important to the early church AND these issues still resonate with us today.

## THE CONTEXT

As mentioned, the book of First Peter is written to the early church. And how do we know that? We know this because of how the letter begins. The letter begins by saying:

*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,*

*To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,<sup>2</sup> who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood:*

*Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*

### **1 Peter 1:1-2 (NIV)**

A clearer understanding of who the letter is addressed to comes from Eugene Peterson's *The Message* where he writes:

*Peter, am an apostle on assignment by Jesus, the Messiah, writing to exiles scattered to the four winds. Not one is missing, not one forgotten. God the Father has his eye on each of you, and has determined by the work of the Spirit to keep*

*you obedient through the sacrifice of Jesus. May everything good from God be yours!*

### **1 Peter 1:1-2 (The Message)**

These first few lines is important for us to understand because it states for us WHO is writing this letter and to WHOM he is writing this letter to. And from this passage we know that he is writing to the “exiles scattered to the four winds”. In other words, he is writing to the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.

**[SLIDE of Map]**



As you can see, from the slide, the area that 1 Peter is covering is a pretty large one, especially in those days.

The other thing that we need to keep in mind is that 1 Peter is written from “Babylon” which is found in 1 Peter 5:13, which is most likely a code word for Rome.

This is important for us to remember, because this letter was written in a time and place that was dangerous because it was written from a spiritual point of view as well as a political point of view as well.

What I mean by that is the early church and what it stood for was closely tied up not only in a person’s spiritual life but also the world in which they lived in. If you think about the cross, the symbol in which the church today cherishes so much, the cross in the days of Jesus meant something much different than what it means to us today.

When we think about the cross today, we think of the church. We’re reminded of the death and resurrection of Christ. Yet, in the days of Jesus the cross was a political symbol. The cross in those days symbolized the power of Rome.

The cross was reserved for making a political statement. NT Wright in his book, *The Day the Revolution Began* describes how the cross as it was used when Rome had won its victory. NT Wright says this:

***“The real-life Spartacus, who led a major slave revolt, met his end about a hundred years before Jesus. Many died in the final battle, but six thousand of his***

*followers were crucified all along the 130 or so miles of the Appian Way from Rome to Capua (inland from Naples), making it roughly one cross every forty yards (Appian Civil Wars 1.120).” - NT Wright, The Day the Revolution Began (page 57).*

Can you imagine? A cross every 40 yards? And what was the purpose? It was so that people were traveling along the Apian Way to Rome would be reminded that NOBODY messes with Rome.

The power of Rome was all about striking fear into its enemies. Conquering countries and expanding its territory meant that those who came under Roman rule lost their identity and were assimilated into THE ROMAN WAY of life. Punishment was handed out to those who dared to stand up to the Roman Empire and the cross was reserved for those who were slaves and those who were enemies of the state. Those enemies of the state were those who we call a conspirator, someone who actively sought out bringing the downfall of the Empire.

And so when Christ was nailed to the cross, this form of punishment meant that Jesus too was a slave to Rome. When he died on that cross it symbolized that Rome was victorious and that everything that Jesus had taught in his three and a half years of ministry was gone. His death was supposed to symbolize that the ROMAN WAY of life reigned supreme.

But we know that this couldn't be further than the truth. We know that and especially celebrating Easter a few weeks ago that death doesn't have the final say. We know that Christ claimed victory on the cross because he rose from the dead. Victory, as the church understands it is found in Christ!

### **Roman Way vs the Kingdom Way**

And so the book of first Peter is written in a world that was dominated by the Roman Empire. Wherever you turned, there was a reminder that you lived not for yourself but instead you lived for the Caesars. Now this was a pretty big deal because the Romans would have you believe that there was no other choice. From the temples of the Roman gods to the power of the Roman Empire, everywhere you turn, there was a reminder of Rome. Even in paying your taxes, that money went to Rome to fund their way of conquering others so that the entire world would live the Roman Way.

And so when 1 Peter is written, we see that Peter, is encouraging the church to live the way Jesus would have them live. Living the way the Kingdom of Heaven would have you live in direct tension in how the Kingdom of Rome taught you to live. That's why the book of 1 Peter is so powerful.

In 1 Peter 1 vs 13 Peter reminds the church that Christ is coming. The scriptures say:

***14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." – 1 Peter 1: 14-15***

Peter reminds the early church that they are children. And not only children but they are obedient children so therefore do not go back to your old ways of living. You used to live the Roman Way, but you did that because you didn't know better! Now you do, and so live a life the Kingdom Way. In other words live like he who is Holy, like your Father in Heaven. And then Peter quotes from the book of Leviticus that says, "Be holy, because I am holy."

## **HOLY**

The word holy is a word that we use often in church. It's something that we think of as being "pure" or perfect. Often times we'll think of words like sacred, consecrated, hallow, and sanctified when we think of the word Holy. But what does the word "holy" really mean?

The definition of "holy" means to be "set apart". But what does it mean to be set apart?

In 1 Peter, it says "Be holy, because I am holy." The call to be holy in Leviticus was taken out of the promises that God was making to Israel after they had been rescued out of Egypt. God is saying here, you will be my people, and I will be your God. We

will be in relationship to one another. Therefore, be holy, because I am holy. 1 Peter quotes from Leviticus, not because being holy was a moral obligation. 1 Peter is quoting from Leviticus because he is reminding the early church that don't forget who you are in relationship with! Christ died on the cross of your sin. Even though you've never seen him, you believe! So be holy, be set apart from the Roman Way and practice the Kingdom Way because we know that Christ has victory over the cross!

### **Vs 17 – live out your lives as foreigners**

And that's why 1 Peter continues on this theme of being set apart by reminding his readers that you are foreigners, people who are not from this place. Peter says, live differently! Remember that you have a Father in heaven who is a good father. But like any good father, he will also disciplines as well. I like the way the Message puts it. It says here

***“17 You call out to God for help and he helps—he’s a good Father that way. But don’t forget, he’s also a responsible Father, and won’t let you get by with sloppy living.” – 1 Peter 1:17 (The Message)***

When we take a moment to stop and think about what it means to be a foreigner that lives in a strange land, and we often think about maybe living in Asia or Europe or maybe even in Africa.

Can I get a how of hands to see how many people might have lived in a country other than Canada?

Being a foreigner, living in a strange land resonates for me. Alli, my wife, and I have lived in Prince George for about two and a half years. And our daughter Alyx was born right here in this city as well. But having moved to Prince George, I get a sense that I am a foreigner in a strange land. There are things about this place that have taken some time to get used to. For example. Trucks. There is an over abundance of big 4 X 4 pick up trucks. Or snow. It felt like the winter kept on going on and on until this past week. Or camouflage. Even as I was preparing today's sermon, writing in the Tim Horton's, I couldn't help but notice how there's so much more camouflage here.

But living as a foreigner has become even MORE of a reality for us. We feel it EVEN MORE when we go back to Vancouver and Toronto where we're from. What do I mean by that? I mean that in both Toronto and Vancouver, we've noticed that the pace is always go go go. Everybody is busy. People are in a rush to go places and do things. And very rarely do people have time to sit down and chat and just BE. That is the Toronto Way.

Living in Prince George on the other hand, we've noticed that the pace of life is different. It's a bit slower, but also busy. BUT, the biggest difference that we've

noticed is something that I've nicknamed, the NORTHERN WAY. What is the NORTHERN WAY? The Northern Way means that although Prince George is a smaller city, WE, the people of the North, are in it TOGETHER. Being brand new transplants to Prince George, we've noticed that people are MORE WILLING to lend a hand, to be there for you.

Let me ask you this question. Who here was born in Prince George?

And how many people have moved from a different place?

The story that I keep hearing over and over again is that people who have lived in Prince George that are transplants keep telling me that the plan was to move to Prince George for one year. Which was FORTY years ago.

The Northern Way, whatever you want to call it, some how attracts people to stay.

In the same way, 1 Peter is reminding the church. You are now part of the Kingdom of Heaven! You are no longer a part of the Kingdom of Rome. You are different now because you are foreigners. You don't belong to this place. And for some reason IF you FEEL different, the reason is because you ARE different.

The Roman Way was all about exerting power. Conquering others. Nailing the rebels and the enemies of the state to the cross. It was a display of power and you let EVERYBODY know it.

The Kingdom Way is the complete opposite. It redeems everything. INCLUDING the cross. No longer does the cross strike fear in the hearts of people. The cross now symbolizes hope. And that hope is in Christ.

**Reminded that we were redeemed by the blood of Christ - the Roman Way was to destroy by blood, but the Kingdom Way is to be redeemed by blood**

That's why as 1 Peter addresses the Early Church that has been scattered to the four winds, he reminds them in verses 18-21. It says this:

***<sup>18</sup> For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. <sup>20</sup> He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. <sup>21</sup> Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. 1 Peter 1:18-21***

What 1 Peter is saying here, don't forget your new identity! No longer are you a people that have been conquered by Rome. You are no longer people who have been assimilated into the machine that is the Roman Empire. You have a new identity in Christ because you have been redeemed by Christ. It was through his sacrifice and his blood that you are now children of God.

Don't forget that Christ was the sacrificial lamb that was without blemish or defect. And this was God's plan all along. It is through this sacrifice that you believe in God and it was through God that Christ has been raised from the dead. Death no longer has the final say and BECAUSE of this, you have faith and hope in God.

**The church today is to be an Embassy of Heaven, therefore practice the Kingdom Way / the Carolina Way**

This is the ultimate reminder for all of us BOTH in the Early Church and for the Church today. If we have been redeemed by Christ, then our identity is in Christ. If our identity is in Christ, then our whole perspective, our whole way of living should change as well.

In 1 Peter, it continues on and it says:

***<sup>22</sup> Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. <sup>23</sup> For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 1 Peter 1: 22-23***

Now that you've cleaned up your lives, now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth, live out your lives with sincere love for each other. And this love is deep. It comes straight from the heart. 1 Peter goes on to say, remember that you have been born again. Your identity is no longer in your old way of life, but it is in God. The concept of being born again is huge! It means that everything now starts fresh in God. And all of this through the living and enduring word of God. You have been included in a new family. And that is good news.

This idea of being born again is not new to the church. But let me offer you an example that could give us fresh eyes, to what 1 Peter is saying.

The best analogy that I have heard recently comes from Regent College and more specifically the Reframe Course. I know that here at St. Giles', we have gone through this course before.

**[SLIDE OF UNITED KINGDOM EMBASSY]**



For those of you who were there, do you remember the example that was used with regards to the Embassy? Paul Williams, the research professor for the Market Place and Theology Leadership at Regent College tells of a story of how when he was visiting Washington DC he had a chance to visit the Embassy for the United Kingdom. During that visit, he recalls everything in that place reminded him of being home. Everything from the furniture to the china reminded him of the United Kingdom. Professor Williams goes on to make the comparison that IF the church is supposed to be an Embassy for Heaven, here on Earth, would people visiting get that impression?

This example of the Embassy of Heaven really has stuck with me over the last year and a half. Is the church today a real and fair representation of the Heaven? Would people who are visiting this place see in the lives of its people a difference? Like the furniture and the china being a representation of the United Kingdom, would our lives represent what Heaven would look like?

These are deep and serious questions that we need to consider.

And that's why in 1 Peter the author says

Now that you've purified yourselves by obeying the truth, love one another deeply.

This command isn't just some phrase that has been thrown into the letter of 1 Peter. Instead this practical way of loving one another is an outworking of the hope that we have in Christ.

Remember when Jesus was being tested and was asked what the greatest commandment was?

Jesus responds by saying –

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”<sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup>And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup>All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” – Matthew 22: 37-40*

**[SLIDE: Clothes pin / Clothes Line Slide]**



This phrase, “all the law and prophets hang on these two commandments” could best be described as if loving the Lord your God was a clothes pin and loving your neighbour as yourself was a clothes pin, then everything that the law and the prophets teach, they hang on these two things.

## **Conclusion for the Church Today**

Friends, as we consider the words of 1 Peter this morning, let us be reminded of Christ's answer when he was being tested. If the church is to be an Embassy for Heaven, we are called to Practice the Kingdom Way. Let's not be bogged down and distracted from this calling. We are called to practice, practice, practice.

Going back to our example early on this morning about practicing piano, I can tell you that when I was first learning how to play a piece of music, I was not good at it at all. But after all those hours of practicing which at the time I hated, I began to realize that I would get better and better at it with more and more practice.

In the same way of living out the Kingdom Way, we too need practice. We need to practice not just once a week on Sundays when we come to this building for worship. But we need to practice it every day and in every part of our lives. We practice so that we can become good at what we are called to do.

As 1 Peter says, "Be Holy, because I am Holy". Practice the Kingdom way, so that everyone who we meet might get a taste of Heaven. Be Holy as Christ is Holy.

Amen.