

Sermon, 21.05.2023 Lake of Bays

It's lovely to end the Easter season with this morning's readings. They present the 3 most essential elements of the faith - of the 1st Xns as of our own. That is:

- 1) The unity and reciprocity of Jesus Chr with God the Father. 2) The glory of their eternity and of our union with them in eternal life.*
- 3) That Jesus is no longer in the world, but praying for us who are in the world.*

*I like to get really near the writers of the Bible. So come with me and look a bit at 1 Peter. It is called the epistle of **courage**, come wind come weather, to us on our life's **pilgrimage**. On which, we are led by **hope**, actually an over-reaching hope, that relies on nothing less than the living God who raised J Chr from the dead. This hope assures us that we too at our journey's end will enjoy beyond the decay of our earthly bodies the same incorruptibility that describes the union of Jesus with God.*

What can it all mean, this biblical jargon. You might be curious, as are all biblical scholars. They always start with lots of qns. So let's look at it as they do.

First qn, the validity of this epistle.

Did Peter the apostle, one of the 12, really write it?

External evidence says yes, very likely. External to the text itself, it is referenced as authentic by early Xn writers and set in the canon of NT books with no discrepancy.

Internal evidence, within the text itself, also suggests yes.

Yet some scholars wonder: the Greek is too good to be that of the local fisherman of Capernaum. True enough, but the letter says that it was written with the help of Silvanus. Now Silvanus who accompanied Paul on his travels to Greece and Europe, is well known to have drafted decrees to the churches, to have preached in Grk and to have been a literary person.

2) A second doubt arises from the many ideas and expressions in 1 Peter that seem to be copied from the letters written by Paul. However, recent understanding is that much of what was once thought to come out of the mind of Paul was not so unique to him after all. A lot of it was of common style and vocabulary.

3) Thirdly, Peter was so close to the earthly Jesus; in this letter, does that intimacy show up anywhere? Superficially you might think not, but a close study reveals that in fact, yes. In many instances the writer assumes his closeness to Jesus, but his aim in writing the letter is not to prove anything about himself; again, it is to encourage the readers in their own time and circumstance, showing that by way of Christ's resurrection, they too know intimacy with him.

4) The letter refers to a time of persecution. The first widespread persecution of the Church began at the beg of the 2nd c. and some biblicists would say that Peter could not possibly have lived that long. And yet it is well known how Paul and others among the Xns in Rome, likely Peter himself,

were put to death already in the early 60's under that fool of an emperor Nero. So persecution was a fate known by Xns from the very beg. Peter speaks of sufferings in Babylon (5:13) And it is well est'd that when the NT speaks of Babylon, it means Rome. However, Peter still counsels obedience to the emperor. So serious biblical scholars situate this letter just before the persecutions in 64. He speaks of an **impending** persecution, not yet actual. And he is warning Xns in the Asian churches, that is to say in Anatolia, modern day Turkey. Whether these believers are Jews of the dispersion or pagans, that is irrelevant. And this is a circular letter. The names of these churches come in the order of a round trip a carrier would make through Anatolia.

So Peter's aim, by the authority of his own important experience, is to fortify those Xns, urging them to stand firm. He reminds them how much they have been blessed by having this hope of the gospel; he calls them to be dutiful towards non-believers, before civil authorities, between spouses. And however much the present trials of life may be difficult, go ahead, he says, cast all your worries on God who cares for you.

Now all that applies to us just as well as to those who first got the letter. We may live in a country whose laws protect us at least today from religious persecution. But many of us might be sort of persecuted in very subtle ways for our faith, even within our own families, and often, maybe just for

the sake of politeness, we deny that faith, or override it. And suffering, just plain old suffering, who can say I don't need strength and forbearance to abide it. There's nothing like aging for humbling us. Not only do we become weaker and less steady on our feet, we have seen an accumulated amount of different sorts of worry in this world. That's how life is under the sky, or, as Peter says it here, under God. So let us not assume we don't need the kind of encouragement Peter is giving.

What did Peter actually believe, that we should also believe? 1) in God of the Hebrew scriptures: creator, living, transcendent, holy, patient, gracious. (hesed); but also 2) in God as the Father of Christ to whom we also can pray, who has power over death.

Peter doesn't assume any formal church organization, he has no great ecclesiology, except that from now on both Jews and Pagans are included in it. He just makes a proclamation, the Greeks used the word hermes or kerygma, the message of Xr crucified, risen. The old prophesies thus fulfilled of the coming of the Messiah. Peter does not expand on the idea of the Msh, which was likely not a very well understood concept outside the land of the Jews. The word, first of all, meant the use of oil to heal, to anoint, and in Greek to beautify as in make-up.

Yet Peter has been so influenced by his own denial of Jesus followed by the powerful experience of the

resurrection, that now he clearly understands Chr as the sinless model of suffering risen to God's side in the place of highest authority to which all cosmic forces are subject. That just goes to show the huge effect that first Easter had on the disciple Peter.

Many people today see Jesus as a teacher of morals. Even some biblicists might think that first there was just the teaching of ethics, as in the sermon on the mount. That would not make Xy much different from any other of the world's religions and so, of course, it might make us more comfortable with pluralism and relieve us of any obligation to share the gospel.

The trouble is that, Xy is historical, and historically, the proclamation of Chr's death and resurrection came first. The uniqueness of the Xn fai is not morals. The practice of baptism, clearly confirmed in Peter's epistle, is not the literal removal of dirt but the relieving of a guilty conscience. The ethical side of the Xn faith, first called the didache, was built upon the proclamation of the empty tomb, because the power of the resurrection is what makes the moral life possible for the believer in Christ.

So again it is very fitting that we end this Easter season with the proclamation of the resurrected Christ. And of our HOPE in a GLORY for all of us yet to be revealed.

And meanwhile, we are upheld by Christ's own prayer for us, prayer addressed to the Father, a term which from the

outset bases it on that sympathetic, understanding, kindly attitude of a Father, slow to anger, eager to help, who cares. For himself, Jesus first prays not that the cup of suffering be spared him, but that this impending hour of suffering serve to glorify God. And so, as Peter says, it is given to us to pray that God will grant that when our hour comes, of pain or disappointment or sorrow or loss, we may face it with a touch of Christ's unselfishness and gallantry and quiet and unshakable trust in God.

Then Christ prays that his suffering might serve to bring eternal life to those women and men who have been given to him throughout his ministry on earth. Eternal life does not refer to an existence in the future or in the present, but in a mystic sense, in both, as living in the knowledge of God, as a standard of measurement of how life should be lived and used. So rather than feel the doom of failure, Christ was able to say, Father, I have accomplished what you gave me to do.

What a claim: before dying as a criminal! So we are given to reflect what we can still do to accomplish God's will for our lives.

Jesus' prayer goes on to assure us that each one of us has his or her own secure place in God's heart. We have One who will take care of us in our foolishness and weakness. He reminds us that we have been given his word. And finally, he insists on our unity with himself and God the Father. There is no more closely knit friendship than that. Jesus thanks God

for his friends. How often might we thank God for our friends, in our prayers, as often and more as we pray for them in their needs. Let's just sometimes thank God for them.

And lastly, Jesus knows the dangers we face in this world. He prays that God will keep us as we face those perils, will keep us in his eternally secure Name, as His. And above else, that we will be kept together, not only in union each one with Him, but that there be no disunity among ourselves. We have only to glance at the rest of the NT, at the letters to the various churches and what followed to know how right was Christ's prayer, before the risk of so much disintegration into little angry, snarling sects, opposing, condemning, excommunicating one another. So we must pray, "Hold us together; help us to preserve our unity". As is our over-reaching hope, above all that looks hopeless, our unity amongst Xns is also an over-arching, all encompassing envelope. Of course, we speak different languages, we feed in different cultural pastures, expressing our emotions differently - having concerns very different from others; here in Ontario we have been waiting even impatiently for spring to come, and for the level of the rivers and lakes to come down, while in Alberta our relations suffer from dryness and heat and fires and smoke. Things like that on a global scale over the centuries make the Chr churches look like completely opposing entities. Some are flourishing while others are

languishing. Yet somehow Christ sees us all as in unity because his love is great enough to include all.

So to conclude, whatever, wherever, however, our faith and hope is based on nothing less than Christ crucified and risen, on his unity with God and ours with him. The God of all grace who called us to eternal glory in Christ will see that all is well. He will confirm, strengthen and support us.