

QUARANTINE, ISOLATION, LOCKDOWN, PANDEMIC are words we have all heard much of lately. We hear an entirely different vocabulary of good news in Peter’s first epistle: “*New Birth, Living Hope, Imperishable Seed, Enduring Word.*” Through the resurrection of Jesus we are given these amazing gifts. Peter conveys the astounding good news in his letter to “*God’s elect, scattered exiles.*” Peter also makes a critical contrast found in both Paul’s letters and in the Old Testament: the perishable becomes *imperishable*. Being born anew, means being *reborn* in one’s life, and in one’s faith.

As Paul puts it, “*So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body*” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Peter claims the same promise: “*And this is the word that was preached to you*” (v. 25), an “*imperishable seed*” means that we have a new life “*through the living and enduring word of God*” (v. 23). Why is this? Because God is merciful and God is God. The metaphor of God’s Word as an imperishable “seed” recalls the contrasting metaphor of Isaiah 40, quoted in verses 24-25: “*All people are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever.*”

First Peter defines the Christian life, speaks it into being through the Word of God, and this kind of life, means love, love that is genuine, mutual, deep, from the heart. That’s not too much to ask, is it? Love that is genuine—passionate, joyful, full; love that is mutual—not self-serving; love that is deep—not passing or frail; love that is “*from the heart*” (v. 22). Like the hope Peter spoke of earlier, hope that is living (i.e. life-giving and on-going), so is love. The love proclaimed is the same, life-giving, a way of life. Love, the love that is ours in Christ Jesus, is not merely to be felt; it is to be lived. The reason for this is that the living and enduring word of God has been preached to us; the good news of what Christ accomplished for us—forgiving our sin—comes through his resurrection from the dead (1:21). Martin Luther said all of this was accomplished for a purpose: “All this he has done that I may be his own, live under him, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternity.”

The “imperishable seed” which is in us when we are in Christ is God’s deposit of our new birth, just as any seed planted in the spring is a promise of new life. This was never meant to be a human-designed transaction. Peter wants those who are redeemed to know that the new birth is a creative miracle. Those “*in Christ*” are the product of an act of God. This is something we could not have arranged. Christians are alive by a creative act and we live by a continuing creative miracle.

James says this very same thing in almost identical language in his epistle (1:18) and Paul says it in practically the same way in Ephesians 2. If the apostles believed anything about themselves and their fellow believers, they believed that the new birth was the result of a creative work of God which brought a believer into a new sphere, a new order of things—out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. And love is implicit in the new birth because it has been planted within us.

This imperishable seed comes “*through the living and enduring word of God*” as Peter says. The reference is to those acts and commands of a creative God who “*calls into being things that were not*” (Romans 4:17). This is the creative God of Genesis creating again from the chaos and darkness of the human spirit. “*For God, who said, Let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ*” (2 Cor. 4:6).

The same Spirit who “brooded over the face of the deep” turns people from idols to serve the living and true God. No weak impotent religion could accomplish this! This was no exchange of one religious view for another; one form of bondage for another. This was the fulfillment of all that God ordained. No darkness or chaos could resist his creative will in the natural sphere; and no ugly moral darkness could prevail against his redemptive will. If we have been reborn by a creative act of the eternal God, the demands of loving unlovely people call for a miracle of creativity of which only God is capable. Only God can provide pure hearts and fervent spirits if we are to learn to love.

Simply trying harder to love one another, or, for that matter, to manifest any fruit of the Spirit without the creativity and power of God’s presence and sustaining grace is as futile as it is foolish. It is as unconvincing and as unsatisfying as a bowl of artificial fruit is to a hungry person. Good thing the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank didn’t give out artificial fruit on Wednesday at the airport, but instead gave real fruit and boxed food to hungry families! Our self-effort has a very short shelf life, as disappointing to God as it is to a skeptical world. Bearing fruit in the Spirit is nothing short of a *miracle* of God’s creative grace! Jesus made it plain to Peter and his companions that fruitfulness was not only the will of God, but it was impossible for anyone to be fruitful without Christ’s presence and power. Jesus stated in John 15:4: *“No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”*

One of the wonders of Jesus’ incarnation and redemption was that all things God had spoken to the fathers by the prophets were given their full meaning. The law of Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets became clear. Every stubborn, unyielding area of darkness shone with the glory of Messianic fulfillment. Not only was God’s Word vindicated by the passion of Christ, but what God did in him was done *“once for all,”* eternally. What God said to us in the revelation of his Son is so final, and so complete, so imperishable, so living and eternal, that *“no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ”* (1 Corinthians 1:20).

Another thing that Peter and the other apostles didn’t allow was for anyone to have confidence in the flesh, that is, human ability apart from God. Peter uses the words of the prophet Isaiah to put our lives in a context that provides a contrast we cannot easily disregard: *For, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever”* (Isaiah 40:6-8). Humbling, isn’t it?

When responding to a question about the meaning of life and God, world famous physicist Michio Kaku, said that most physicists do believe in a God because of how the universe is designed. Ours is a universe of order, beauty, elegance and simplicity. The universe didn’t have to be this way—it could have been ugly and chaotic. In short, the order we see in the universe is proof of God. “I have concluded that we are in a world made by rules created by an intelligence,” the physicist said, according to *Science World Report*. “Believe me, everything that we call chance today won’t make sense anymore. To me it is clear that we exist in a plan which is governed by rules that were created, shaped by a universal intelligence and not by chance.” Michio Kaku explained that God is like a great mathematician, which I think is similar to what Albert Einstein believed.

When the apostles preached and wrote the Gospel they were doing more than merely telling a story or bearing witness to things they had seen. They were also declaring that in Christ everything God had promised was carried out. God’s Word accomplished the purpose for which it had been sent. Redemption

was signed and sealed in the blood of Christ. Nothing happened by chance. This was all done so that we creatures and our Creator could be reconciled.

This reconciliation marks us as those who are to *“live out [our] time as foreigners here in reverent fear”* (v. 17), moving toward God’s promised inheritance by faith. *“The living and enduring word of God”* guarantees our inheritance, and compels us to evaluate all things according to their “eternal” value. An old Gospel song captures the meaning of the word “foreigners” as Peter uses it in v.17: “This world is not my home. I’m just a-passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door. And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.”

During the strange and stressful time we are now living in, one writer has wisely noted: “In the rush to return to normal, use this time to consider which parts of normal are worth rushing back to.”

And we now know the apostle Peter would say that it’s definitely worth considering. Amen.