

Do you remember about 6 years ago we were frequently hearing words like QUARANTINE, DISTANCING, LOCKDOWN, PANDEMIC? We haven't heard those words lately, have we? We hear a different vocabulary of words that do not communicate alarm or disaster, but rather, announce good news in Peter's first epistle: *“Set your hope on grace...Be holy in all you do...Obey the truth so that you have sincere love...For you have been born again of imperishable seed...Through God's living and enduring word.”* Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we are given these truly amazing gifts. Peter conveys this astounding good news in his letter to *“God's elect, exiles scattered...”* Right off the bat Peter makes an important contrast also found in Paul's letters as well as the Old Testament. In this season of springtime, the perishable seed becomes *imperishable*. We are born again. It's a *rebirth* in human lives and in our faith.

As Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15: *“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised 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 natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.”* (vv. 42-44). Peter makes this same promise. He claims that an *“imperishable seed”* means we have a new life *“through the living and enduring word of God”* (v. 23). How is this even possible? Because God is merciful, and God is gracious, 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 by Peter: *“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.”*

The apostle Peter says the Christian ***way of life*** is spoken into being through the Word of God, and this ***way of life*** overflows with love—love that is sincere, mutual, and deeply experienced from the heart. **Is that too much to ask of us who have been given so much?** Love that is **genuine**—passionate, joyful, full. Love that is **mutual**—not self-serving. Love that is **deep**—not temporary or frail. Love that is *“from the heart”* (v. 22). Like the hope Peter spoke of in v. 3, hope that lives, that is, hope that is life-giving and on-going, so is this love!

Love proclaimed is exactly the same because it provides us with a *way of life*. The love that is ours in Jesus, is not merely to be **felt**. It is to be **lived**. The origin of this is that *the living and enduring word of God* has been preached to us. We have heard the good news of what the Lord accomplished for us through his resurrection from the dead (v. 21). Martin Luther said all of this was accomplished for a purpose: “All this he has done that [we] 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 redeemed by Christ is God’s deposit of our new birth, just as any seed planted in the springtime 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 who are “*in Christ*” are the product of an act of God. This is something we could never arrange on our own. Christians are alive by the creative act of God, and we can only “*be holy in all we do*” (v. 15) by God’s continuing creative miracle. Holy cow!! Or better yet, *Holy Hope!!*

James says this in almost identical language in the first chapter of 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 Christians, they believed that the new birth was the result of the creative work of God which brings a believer into a new reality, a new order of things—*out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light*. Hope and love are implicit in this new birth because they are planted within us...not to mention faith.

Loving “*one another deeply, from the heart*” is the result of a new birth “*through the living and enduring word of God*” according to Peter. 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 same creative God of Genesis, in this case creating light and life from the chaos and darkness of the human spirit. Paul wrote to the Corinthians “*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 Corinthians 4:6).

The same Spirit who “*brooded over the face of the deep*” turns people from idols to serve the true and living God. No weak impotent religion could accomplish this! This is not an exchange of one religious view for another: one form of bondage for another. This is 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 unlovable people call for a creative miracle which only God can do. Only God can give us pure hearts and renewed spirits if we are to learn to love.

Simply trying harder to love one another, or, for that matter, producing 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’s 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 to TSA workers at the airport a couple of weeks ago. They gave real fruit and real food to employees struggling to provide for their families! Loving others based on self-effort has a very short shelf life. It’s as disappointing to God as it is to a world in need. But bearing the fruit of the Spirit is nothing short of a *miracle* of God’s grace and creative power! Jesus made it very plain to Peter that fruitfulness is not only the will of God, but it is impossible for anyone to be fruitful without Christ’s presence and power. Remember that Jesus states in John 15:5: “*If you remain in me and I and you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*” You’ve heard me repeat those words every time we pass the communion cups for the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

One of the wonders of Jesus’ incarnation is that all things God spoke by the prophets were given their fullest meaning. The Law of Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets were now completely clear. Every stubborn, unyielding area of darkness shone with the glory of Jesus’ 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,*” for all eternity. What God said to us in the revelation of his Son is so final, so complete, so imperishable, so living and eternal, that “*no*

matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 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, in our human ability apart from God. Peter uses the words of the prophet Isaiah to put our lives in context to provide a contrast that we cannot easily ignore: *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"* (vv. 24-25). 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. According to *Science World Report*, the physicist says, "I have concluded that we are in a world made by rules created by an intelligence," "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 explains that God is like a great mathematician, which I think is very similar to what Albert Einstein believed.

When the apostles preached and wrote the Gospels they were doing more than merely telling a story or bearing witness to things they had seen. They were also declaring that in Jesus Christ everything God 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 Jesus. None of it happened by chance. It was all done so that we creatures and our Creator could be reconciled.

As verse 17 says, this reconciliation marks us as those who are to, "*live out [our] time as foreigners here in reverent fear*" which moves us toward God's promised inheritance by faith. God's *Holy Hope* and "*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.

John Maxwell in his book, *Think on These Things*, writes about some of the attributes of hope that make hope *holy*:

- Hope shines brightest when the hour is darkest.
- Hope motivates when discouragement comes.
- Hope energizes when the body is tired.
- Hope sweetens while the bitterness bites.
- Hope sings when all melodies are gone.
- Hope believes when the evidence is eliminated.
- Hope climbs over obstacles when no one is helping.
- Hope listens for answers when no one is saying a word.
- Hope endures hardships when no one is caring
- Hope smiles when no one is laughing.
- Hope dares to give when no one is sharing.
- Hope brings a victory when none is winning.

Jesus Christ the Son of God came to us lowly and without pedigree or prestige. He offers all humanity the one intangible we could not acquire on our own—HOPE. Today will you grasp his hand and receive *Holy Hope* from him?

I know the apostle Peter would say that *Holy Hope* is the only thing worth holding on to. Amen.