

“FROM THE PEN OF PETER.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: I Peter 1:1-2

Introduction.

Most of you know the joy of growing up in a small town where everyone seems to know your business and remember your past. Many of you have stories you could tell on each other, some of them going all the way back to elementary school playground or stupid things you did in high school or someone you dated or someone you babysat for or who babysat you.

I moved so many times growing up that I am fairly confident the trail behind me is cold. No one has much dirt on me except my brother and sister and of course they're safe since I have the goods on them as well.

Imagine if not just the people of Lynden knew your stuff, but imagine if the whole world knew all about you. Imagine if your stuff was written down in the Bible.

The Author: The Apostle Peter.

As we come to consider the letters Peter wrote our minds can't help but go back over thirty years. Remember that time he started to walk on water and then got scared and began to sink.

Remember when Peter told Jesus that he would never suffer and be killed and Jesus rebuked him and called him Satan.

Remember when Peter in a fit of temper cut off a man's ear with a sword. Remember when Peter kept falling asleep in the garden the night Jesus was betrayed. Remember when Peter swore he would never deny Jesus and then he did and not just once but three times.

Peter was a man, a sinner like you and me, a clay pot, just another uneducated fisherman from Galilee. If Peter had grown up around here he would drive a diesel truck, a little lifted. He would have a boat, in fact, probably two boats, a lake boat and a bay boat. He wouldn't have gone to LC, his parents weren't Christians. And everybody would know him since he was such a loud mouth.

But all of that is over thirty years ago. A lot has happened since those early days with Jesus. Jesus was merciful and picked Peter up after he fell. The Holy Spirit came on Peter at Pentecost and he preached his first sermon and three thousand people repented and believed in Jesus for their salvation.

By the time Peter wrote his first letter he was much older and wiser, a godly man and respected leader. Quite a change from his days as a fisherman and early follower of Jesus.

He was a chosen apostle of Jesus Christ, an ambassador, sent out to preach the Gospel and plant churches. After Pentecost those who have been Jesus' disciples began to be called apostles.

It is interesting to note that this is the only office attached to Jesus Christ in the NT. There are no prophets of Jesus Christ or teachers or evangelists of Jesus Christ, only apostles of Jesus Christ. Only they had the authority equal to OT prophets, to speak and write the very words of God.

This reminds us as we study this letter that we are reading the very words of God, they have full and complete divine authority. Receive this as God's truth for you. Take it seriously and take it to heart. Having heard these words you will be accountable for what you do with them.

This is God's revelation, God's truth. You can say you don't understand it, but you cannot say you don't believe it or you disagree with it. That you do at the peril of your soul.

This was written late in Peter's life around 65 AD when he was in prison in Rome, just before he was martyred for his faith in Jesus.

What a debt we owe to apostles who poured out their faith and teaching and their own blood from prisons in Rome. Both Peter and Paul were martyred for their faith under the persecution of Emperor Nero.

The Audience: Believers who are aliens in their own land.

This is a letter written to Christians living in uncertain times, a letter written to Christians wanting help to know how to survive in a pagan and sometimes hostile culture.

This is a letter written to Christians who are increasingly finding themselves to be strangers living in a strange land, their own land.

I Peter 1:1 To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

These areas he names are Roman provinces in what is modern day Turkey covering an area from California to Texas. This isn't a local letter like the ones Paul wrote to Ephesus or Philippi. This is a universal letter.

The order of the cities probably suggests the order they would be visited if you traveled from Rome. It would be like visiting Bellingham, Mt. Vernon, Everett and Seattle. Saying it like that gives a clear picture of someone going from north to south along I-5.

Given this route this letter would reach all the major centers where there was a Christian presence and a Christian church. And from there copies would be made and sent to smaller regions and smaller churches.

The church in Turkey has a very long history. Paul, Peter, Timothy, Mark, Silas all had a hand in starting churches there. And the church in Turkey has had a very long history of persecution to this day.

Why are they aliens?

Only Peter among all the Biblical writers adds an adjective to sojourner that explains why we are sojourners here. That adjective is elect or chosen.

They are aliens, strangers because they are *chosen*. Chosen by whom? Notice they are chosen by the *triune God*, by the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

What does it say to you that all three persons of the Trinity take an active role in your life? The Father's past foreknowledge, the Spirit's present work to bring us to an ongoing and future faithful obedience to Christ.

This was not an afterthought of God because the Jews had rejected Jesus. This was not Plan B, we are not second class citizens, we are part of God's eternal decision from before the foundations of the earth.

God is completely invested in our salvation. The unseen, unheard activity of God is going on all around us all the time. Every event, every circumstance, every hardship and heartache, everything is a tool in the Spirit's hands shaping, influencing, fashioning, accomplishing, "bringing to completion the good work God has begun" (Philippians 1:6).

The greatest evidence of God's investment in us is in the phrase "sprinkling with his blood." This is a visual image and reminder that a life has been given, a penalty has been paid. We are received into God's covenant and His covenant family by blood. We are blood relatives.

It is interesting to hear Peter's words now about the sprinkling with the blood of Jesus, when long ago he had told Jesus He would not die on a cross and shed His blood.

We are being sanctified for obedience, not a perfect obedience, but an obedience with daily continual forgiveness and cleansing and sprinkling with blood.

These three short simple phrases are how you and I became a Christian, how we were saved from sin and "born again to a living hope" (I Peter 1:3).

The word *elect* in the NT always refers to a person chosen by God from out of the world to be in the family of God with all the privileges and blessings that come with that. Among those

blessings is to experience God's grace and mercy daily and the implications of that for all our lives.

Peter is reminding them they are no longer completely at home in this culture and in this world. One of the benefits of going on a mission trip is to get a taste of what it means to be a stranger in a strange land. To feel out of place, to not know the customs and rules, to not understand their concept of time or relationships, to feel the estrangement of not knowing all the unwritten rules.

You can feel it when you are new to a community or a church or any group of people where you are the outsider trying to figure out how to fit in.

When we get married that can alienate us from our single world, when we have kids that can alienate us from those who have no kids. We all have these former lives, these former worlds we once lived in.

Peter knows the feeling well and he identifies with his fellow sojourners. Peter was a Jew traveling in a Gentile world. And as a follower of Jesus he no longer fit in in Israel. Peter looks past race, ethnicity, language, social status or national origin. He looks at our status with God.

We are resident aliens here in Lynden even though we have lived here all our lives and maybe our parents and grandparents as well.

There are ways in which we are radically at odds with our culture and our world. There are more and more things coming at us that we can have no part of. We should not even try to fit in or compromise.

Christianity has enjoyed a long season of tolerance and even respect in this country but that is changing. We need to prepare our hearts and homes, our children and future generations how to live in an increasingly hostile environment.

Our primary citizenship is heaven, not the USA. Our first constitution is the Bible, not the US Constitution. Our first commander and chief to whom we submit is Jesus Christ, not President Obama. Our first oath of allegiance is to our God.

When a professing Christian falls in love with this world, he is in effect renouncing his citizenship in heaven and making shipwreck of his faith. To become caught up with this life is to lose your hope in a life to come. "What does it profit a man to gain this world and lose his soul."

Do you think that ever happens? Of course it does. It happened to Paul in II Timothy:

II Tim. 2:10 Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

But while we are aliens in this world we are not to be alienated from it. God didn't abandon His creation after the fall, but sent His Son to redeem and restore. God sends us out into the world to be salt and light, to redeem and restore and reconcile and sow peace and do good. We are pray for and seek the welfare of our communities and those around us.

Implications and Applications.

Election is a great mystery. It is a doctrine of God, it has to do with God being God and we being lost sinners. It has to do with God's thoughts and ways that are higher than our thoughts and ways. For the believer it is cause for humility, for humble gratitude and worship.

It is a doctrine that offends the proud, offends those who do not acknowledge God as God and who do not acknowledge the depth of our rebellion and guilt and sin.

Churches today are getting away from this doctrine and all doctrine. Most of the church conferences in our country today are about how to grow successful churches and how to be successful Christians. What is ignored and lost is that doctrine is actually practical and encouraging.

This doctrine of election is a tremendous source of comfort and peace. It grounds us in the very center of God's activity and love. God is for us, God is with us.

God chose you, God knows you, nothing in your life is a surprise to Him. Everything in your life has a purpose to Him. He comes behind you, is in you and goes before you.

Why are you chosen? There is not a single good reason, and in fact lots of reasons why you shouldn't be chosen. The only reason is in the wisdom and will of God for His own purposes and pleasure, for His glory and for our blessing. He did it by the sovereign work of His Holy Spirit who was a work in us and is still at work in us. And the Spirit always works to glorify Jesus and His work is to bring us to Jesus through His blood and enable us to obey Jesus.

Are you elect you ask? All who call on the name of Jesus will be saved. If you have confessed Jesus with your lips, if you believe in Him with all your heart, if you have asked to be forgiven and washed in His blood and are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit then you are chosen.

Do you think your life is too small or insignificant? Consider a poor Galilean fisherman minding his own business. You may think your life is just about you going about your business and doing your own thing. About getting up every day and just doing the next thing. Just fishing. But God has some other ideas, something that takes grace and mercy.

Grace.

He starts out his letter saying, “May grace and peace be multiplied to you” (I Peter 1:2) and he ends saying, “I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it” (I Peter 5:12).

Grace is no mere point of theology with Peter, it is not small or casual thing, not just a formula. I wonder if every time he said or wrote the word his mind went back to that courtyard and that fire and that little servant girl and that rooster.

This is a man who really gets grace. He had his soul ripped open until he saw the depth of his sinfulness, denying Jesus three times even after a stern warning from Jesus, even after swearing an oath he would never do such a thing. He knew his need and he understood the greatness of Christ’s forgiveness. He who has been forgiven much loves much. Oh, how Peter loved Jesus, oh, how Peter loved the grace of God.

Peter is well equipped to write to us in our sufferings and trials, in our misery and temptation, in our challenging days at home and at work and in the world. Peter is here to help us not grow weary in well doing, he is here to strengthen our hands and our faith, he is here to help us stand fast and remain faithful, to keep the faith when so many all around us seem to be losing it.

These greetings that begin the letters of Peter and Paul are spoken in faith and when received in faith God honors them. They declare God’s favor to those who are in Christ.

He is asking that God’s undeserved and unmerited freely given favor and kindness be poured out on them in the form of spiritual blessings in every circumstance of life.

This is good news to a people who aren’t feeling much grace and peace in their world.

And it is my prayer that God’s richest blessings of peace and grace and mercy and love and joy will be yours in abundance as we dig into His Word together in this powerful and wonderful letter of I Peter.

Come hungry, come open, come praying for God to open the eyes of your hearts to receive His good gifts for us and His church.