

Anglican Diocese of Ballarat

- JUNE 2024 -

BIBLE READING

Challenge



This year based on
1 & 2 Peter

Introduction

The Rev'd Dr Mark Garner

Fr Mark and his wife, Jill, lived for many years in the UK. He was ordained in the Scottish Episcopal Church, and in 2012 was appointed Head of a Church of England university college in London. When he retired in 2020, he and Jill came to Ballarat to be near their children and grandchildren. Fr Mark serves as one of the Associate Clergy at the Cathedral.

The Bible Challenge

Why should we read the Bible? It is self-evidently not simply a book, but a collection of many and varied books. They range in length from Psalms, which is a collection of poems consisting of some forty-odd thousand words in our English Bibles, to 3 John, which has just over two hundred. In the version of the Bible we commonly use there are 66 books, written at very different times and many different places by about 40 authors. They wrote in particular historical and cultural settings, for specific purposes, and to a wide range of readers. Hence, it doesn't make sense to approach reading the Bible as we do other books, by opening at page 1 and reading steadily through to the end. That inevitably leads to confusion and frustration.

So how should we go about reading the Bible? It is very helpful to treat each book as a particular manifestation of how God reveals Himself to us human beings in our own particular context and with our individual personal interests and needs. Because of the great variety of the books, we meet numerous examples of God's all-encompassing and self-giving love, which reached its wonderful climax in Jesus. If we consistently read the Bible, and allow it to influence the way we live our lives, we can find so much to clarify, strengthen, and maintain our Christian faith. As Paul wrote to the young man, Timothy:

Remember ... how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3: 14—17)

The “challenge” you have accepted is to read a short passage from the Bible, every day throughout the month of June. The readings will be from the two epistles (letters) of Peter, found near the end of the New Testament. To ensure you get the most out of this experience, it will be good to prepare yourself for it in advance.

Although they are called letters, 1 Peter and 2 Peter are quite different from most of the letters we send and receive (or used to, before the days of email and social media). They are not personal messages from a writer to a reader: they are personal statements of a message open to anyone who cares to read it. They are addressed to large numbers of early Christians, scattered throughout the known world, and to us they read more like essays than letters, but essays from which still today we can learn a great deal. Those first Christians were facing challenges not entirely dissimilar to those we struggle with these days.

In order to make their message clearer and more relevant to us, it will help to set these letters in context. Who wrote them? What was going on in the lives of his readers? What gave him the right to pass on advice to them? Why was he so keen to do so?

Who wrote these letters?

As with almost all biblical books, we cannot be entirely sure of the identity of the author (or authors, as it is just possible that these letters were written by two different people). To be sure, each begins with “from [Simon] Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ”, but it was acceptable practice in those days to write in the spirit of a major figure, and to use his name to provide context and authority to the text.

Nonetheless, it seems fairly probable that both letters were the personal work of Peter, the disciple we meet frequently throughout the four gospels. But that Peter was a humble, uneducated fisherman and a blundering (although good-hearted) fellow: how could he have written in such a clear and well-structured way? In fact, he says (in 1 Peter 5:12) that he wrote with the help of a fellow called Silvanus, who may well have been a highly educated and level-headed colleague. It is very possible that what we have in front of us are Peter’s ideas expressed in Silvanus’ style. We will probably never know, but it does not really matter: the important thing is that we can learn a great deal from the letters, regardless of the author’s actual identity.

To whom were they written?

First and Second Peter were probably written in Rome, around 60 A.D. In the quarter century or so since Jesus’ ascension, the gospel had spread rapidly. In Israel, Rome, Asia Minor (modern Turkey), and even beyond, many local churches had sprung up. The word “church” tends to conjure up in our minds a special, often impressive, building designed for and dedicated to regular worship services. In Peter’s day, “church” did not refer to a building, but to a group (usually quite small) of adherents of the new Christian faith, who met in private homes for fellowship, teaching, and worship. These people were a mixture of Jews and non-Jews. The Jews were convinced that Jesus was the longed-for fulfilment of their ancient religion: the chosen one who was establishing the Kingdom of God

on earth. The non-Jews found in Jesus' life and teaching a convincing alternative to the many religions of humanity, the speculative philosophies of Greek thinkers, and the cruel imperialism of Rome.

However, the joy and confidence they experienced in their new-found faith was being undermined by the reactions of the rest of the world. Wherever churches sprang up, the members found themselves being persecuted. This was not yet the horrors perpetrated by a savage, despotic government, such as began a few years after these letters were written. Rather, in those early days Christians were social outcasts. Their neighbours who were outside the church did all they could to make their lives a misery, verbally abusing and at times physically mistreating them. This would, of course, have been very distressing. Peter was clearly worried that many believers felt disheartened, and were tempted to renounce the faith and leave the church.

What can we gain from the letters?

But has what Peter wrote long ago any relevance to us today? Although practising Christians and regular church-goers are in a minority in our society, we do not suffer the sort of open hostility that Peter's readers had to cope with. Nevertheless, we can greatly benefit from his focus on what their—and our—faith is all about. As you work your way through the chapters of his epistles, you will notice that Peter outlines that faith under two main themes, to which he repeatedly returns.

The first theme is the heart of the gospel message: the wonderful promise of Jesus' return, bringing eternal salvation. This, he says, is a constant source of great hope and joy that can lift us above the trials of life on earth. He opens the first letter (after the formalities) with this theme, expressed in a very upbeat fashion:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ... In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. The result will be praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you ... are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1: 3—9)

Although we don't suffer anything comparable to what those early Christians did, it is still easy for us, through the humdrum worries and stresses of daily life, to lose the joy that the gospel message offers. It will be very enriching, on the days throughout the "Challenge" in which you encounter passages like this, to meditate on the hope and joy that Jesus offers.

The second theme addresses what was apparently a concern of his readers: how should they respond to the hostility and antagonism of the world? Peter tells them that what Christians suffer is a parallel with what Jesus suffered. The Christ—God's chosen one—suffered in order to bring redemption to the sinful world. This suffering is central to the faith: it had been repeatedly foretold in the Old Testament, and reiterated by Jesus, for example:

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31)

Through suffering, the Christian becomes one with Christ, which is a source of joy. Peter relates this directly to the first theme, that of Jesus' return:

But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:13)

Peter's view of suffering is very distinctive, and it gives the readers a sense of strength, a reason for living life to the full. This is the opposite of worldly thinking, that suffering is terrible and something to be avoided if at all possible.

As a consequence of what Peter is telling them, the Christians can accept that their rejection by the world is part of God's sovereign plan. This can give them a real sense of confidence and hope in looking to the future. Their faith, in other words, is a source of real joy.

As you read a passage of Peter's epistles every day of this month, you will find it enriching to reflect on questions such as:

- What is the nature of my sufferings for my faith?
- In what ways do I experience joy and hope in my daily life?
- How might joy and hope become even more central to my life?
- How can I share these insights with other people, both Christians and non-Christians?

Keith Romanis

Keith Romanis is the Assistant Chaplain and Chair of Religion, Philosophy & Ethics Faculty at Ballarat Grammar. A member of the Ballarat Diocese Ministry Development Committee, Keith holds a licence to preach in the Diocese of Ballarat and is studying for a Masters of Ministry at Charles Sturt University.

Saturday 1 June

Read the introductory notes and 1 Peter 1.1-2

I don't know about you, but the letters of Peter have not been on the top of my New Testament reading list! We hear the Gospel in Church each Sunday, and the book of Acts gets a good run during Easter, but these letters sit a little more undisturbed after Paul's big letters! This is a shame because as I was reading through, I was surprised by how similar the experiences of the intended audience are to my own.

Peter's audience are not Jewish by birth, they are newly come to Christianity, and the society that they live in can find people of faith strange. But to these people (and perhaps to us) Peter welcomes them in two ways – the first is to claim that the people in the dispersed communities throughout Asia are fellow exiles. This claim suggests that these Christians are members of an Ancient people who have followed God for thousands of years, he claims on their behalf the great Creation stories, Abraham, Moses and all of the experiences of the Covenant people who knew a faithful God. Secondly, Peter greets them as fellow Christians "obedient to Christ" and he wishes them grace and peace in abundance! Peter knows how hard it is to be a Christian, after all he was so scared that he denied Jesus three times! Knowing how hard the choice to follow

Jesus and live out his commands can be, he wishes them God's grace and peace.

Questions

1. What about the great Jewish stories of relationship with God do you relate to? (Think about Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Deborah or Ruth)
2. When you feel like the world is strange, that it is different to when you were young or that it seems so far from ideal, how do come back to your core values?
3. When have you felt God's peace?

Prayer

God, who is more than we can ever comprehend,
help us to seek you,
and you alone.

Help us to stand before all that we could do
and seek what you would do, and do that.

Lift from us our need to achieve all that we can be and instead,
surrender to what you can be in us.

Give us ways to refrain from the busyness
that will put us on edge and off-centre,
give us today your peace.

Sunday 2 June

1 Peter 1.3-5

Following his greeting Peter gives us, in poetic language, a snapshot of the Christian experience: by God's grace and Jesus' actions we have been granted new life. The image is a graphic one, a second birth! This birth means that we are invited into a new family, one with a rich inheritance, and in due course, no matter what happens in the here and now, God will protect us and lead us into new life with God forever!

Questions

1. When have you been given a fresh start?
2. What does "God's rich inheritance" mean to you?
3. What gives you hope? Is it in the stories of fresh starts? Sunrises? Smiling babies? It might not be any of those... where do you find hope?

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for being our Living Hope. Thank you that because of the cross, we are able to not only spend forever with you, but also know that we can trust You with our days because You work everything out for the good of those who love You. Thank you for taking the weight of my sin so that the veil could be torn between us. Thank You for your goodness and faithfulness. Thank you for new life, ne beginning and your abiding love. . Help me to keep my eyes on you so I may do Your will.

In Your name I pray these things, Amen

Monday 3 June

1 Peter 1.6-9

In this next section Peter gets real – life is tough, we suffer through different episodes in our lives. He suggests that these tough times can have a silver (golden?) lining – that through the tough times we are reminded of what is truly important. What is lovely here is that we are reminded of the story of Thomas the patron saint of those who doubt, worry, ask questions, and ultimately believe. Thomas is told by Jesus, and we are reminded by Peter, that it is a blessing to know Jesus without “seeing” him. That joy and hope are available to all of us, that we can know God through Creation, the life of Jesus and the Holy Spirit moving in our lives. Peter reminds his readers that despite the hardships, their salvation is assured – the promise of eternal life with God forever is the result of the journey they have started on.

Questions

1. Can you remember a time in your life, when things seemed too hard to get through, but you made it through somehow?
2. What questions do you ask God? Thomas asked to see Jesus’ wounds, what would you ask Jesus to show you?

Prayer

Wondrous God, We confess that at times our doubts and fears override our hope and faith. Forgive us when we lose sight of the joy of Your love and instead fall into despair and gloom. Lift up our spirits, Lord, and help us to remember the promise of new life here and now, not just the hope of resurrection for the future. We give thanks for Your Son, Jesus the Christ, who continues to offer us new life, who continues to turn us around and upside down, who continues to break down the walls of death in our own life. Forgive us, restore us and renew us. In the name of our risen Savior, Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.

Tuesday 4 June

1 Peter 1.10-12

This section of the text is challenging, it goes back to the relationship the Ancient Jews had with God, that through the prophets certain things were revealed – that there would be a Messiah, that this Messiah would suffer and then overcome suffering! The details weren't clear, but as Peter reminds us, now we know! We know things that the Ancients didn't know, and the gifts that we are being given are impressive, even by the standards of angels! Eugene Peterson (who wrote "The Message" translation of the Bible) translates the last part of verse 12 as: "Angels would have given anything to be in on this!" Yes, we will struggle, yes we will feel adrift at times from the people around us, there will be suffering, but through Jesus our suffering will be overcome!

Questions

1. Peter suggests that the choice we get to make (unlike the angels) is a great gift. What is it about your Christian life that gives you hope or joy?
2. Olympians train (and in many ways suffer) for years to get the chance to compete for a medal, our society praises that commitment. What have you worked at, sacrificed for, that has been life-giving for you?

Prayer

God of yesterday, today and tomorrow,
Thank you for your unfolding plan of salvation,
For your gift of life, for Jesus,
and for the constant presence of your Holy Spirit.
Teach me the lessons I need to learn, open my eyes to see the wonders that you have provided.
I make my prayers in your glorious name:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Wednesday 5 June

1 Peter 1.13-21

So things are going to be hard! But you will be welcomed into a life with God, a life different from the one that we live now. One way of translating “holy” is that it means “not like us”, that’s why it is used so often about God: we are made in the image of God, and we can recognise God in each other, but ultimately God is transcendent, beyond the everyday, “not like us”. This is true too of the life we are being called into. So set your mind on living as Jesus has taught us. Don’t take this opportunity for granted, because what God is offering is better than gold or silver – the things that our human society value are not what God values, instead there is sacrifice and love poured out for one another, living with eyes set on God.

1. Listen to a recording of the hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty”. A lovely contemporary one can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgHrNNM23p8> or you might like a more traditional version here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKN9KxC866I>
2. What is good about being holy like God?
3. What do you think is better than gold or silver in your life?
4. What do you think might get in the way of you setting your hope in God and what might you do about it?

Prayer

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!

We give you thanks for all that you have given us – for mornings, for songs, for the gift of your Son and the constancy of your Spirit in our love.

Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and Mighty!

We give you thanks O God.

Holy, Holy, Holy! All the saints adore Thee,

We give you thanks for showing us the value of things beyond gold and silver, beyond our materialistic concerns.

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!

Help us to keep our eyes set on you.

Holy, Holy, Holy! though the darkness hide Thee,

Help us to be faithful, even when it is hard for us to perceive your glory.

Only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee,

We give you thanks for your invitation to be with you forever.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

Help us to praise you, to see beyond that which is in front of us.

Holy, Holy, Holy! merciful and mighty,

We give you thanks O God. Amen

Thursday 6 June

1 Peter 1.22-2.3

When we pray the Lord's prayer, we pray to God: "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." This image of God's kingdom is not about going to heaven when we die, but living in God's Kingdom here on earth. Peter is reminding us here of both our duty and the joy of living according to God's way, building the Kingdom of God here on earth today – seeing the world with the eyes of a newborn baby. Cling to those things that are eternal, not to the petty jealousies of the world as we so often experience it.

Questions

1. Thinking about your life as a Christian, whether that be one over a long life as part of the Church or a new part of your life – what have you learned about living according to God’s eternal word?
2. What is one thing you would say to encourage someone who was struggling to be hopeful, to someone who was constantly feeling like they didn’t measure up to the damaging standards of thin-ness, wealth, accomplishment that is such a part of our modern culture? How would you help them see with eyes of a newborn baby?

Prayer (The Lord’s Prayer)

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Friday 7 June

1 Peter 2.4-10

The audience of Peter's letter are used to being on the outside. They are set apart from their local communities because they have chosen to set their eyes on God, but they aren't like Jesus and his early disciples direct descendants of Abraham, Moses, or Deborah. But God doesn't see like other people see. The Christians of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, Ballarat and Gippsland are called to be the New Temple, the place that God will dwell. They are empowered to speak to God directly as the new Royal Priests, to live as God's own people! You have suffered, you have felt alone, abandoned, rejected are loved and held high by the Creator of the Universe. The perfecter of all things has come in the form of Jesus to make everything new. It is not just us that are born again, but all society and all creation!

Questions

1. Mary Oliver once asked: "Tell me, what is it you plan do with your wild and precious life?" Peter asks the same question: freed from society's goals, society's expectations, how will you respond to God's call?
2. What will you differently tomorrow? How will you live out God's call to live as God's people, to speak on behalf of God to yourself and to the world?

Prayer

Almighty God, give us wisdom to perceive you, intellect to understand you, diligence to seek you, patience to wait for you, eyes to behold you, a heart to meditate upon you and life to proclaim you, through the power of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Reflections on the Week

1. How does thinking about ourselves as exiles help us keep our eyes on God? (Think about being set apart from our culture, connecting with the Ancient Traditions of God's chosen people and out waiting for the Kingdom of God to be fully realised.)
2. What does it mean that we are "called to be a royal priesthood"?
3. In what ways is your life "wild and precious"? How will you foster this spirit of joy, love and power?
4. If we are to be the Temple that God dwells in, how do we treat ourselves? Do we love ourselves as much as we love our neighbour? What are some changes that you might make to your life to acknowledge that the Creator of the Universe made us, redeemed us and seeks to live with us always?

The Reverend Bill Peacock and Renate Peacock

The Reverend Bill and his wife Renate moved to Ballarat from Caulfield North almost three years ago and have become parishioners at St. Peter's in Ballarat. Bill has been a parish priest in several parishes within the Diocese of Melbourne. His most recent role prior to retirement at the end of 2022 was as Chaplain at Grimwade House, the Junior school of Melbourne Grammar. Renate also retired at the end of 2022 after working almost fifteen years as a Library Technician at Flinders Christian Community College in Carrum Downs on the Mornington Peninsula. Bill follows the Essendon Football club and enjoys gardening, reading and walking. Renate loves to read, do crosswords, walk and spend time with family.

Saturday, 8 June

1 Peter 2.11-12

Live as Servants of God

At this point in the letter, Peter begins a new section drawing out some of the implications of living as Christians in a potentially hostile environment, namely the Roman Empire. But firstly he is concerned that his readers live in a way that is commensurate with their true life in Christ. Unbridled appetites are condemned. But Peter is also concerned that his readers live honourably amongst their neighbours so as to bring glory to God by their good reputation. His admonition in these two verses seems inspired by our Lord's command to "let your light shine before others and give glory to your father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Moreover, here we obtain a glimpse of the perilous situation in which first century Christians were liable to find themselves – being the objects of suspicion, hostility and detestation, suffering various trials and afflictions. Peter's exhortation is a reminder that Christians are to behave in

ways consistent with our beliefs, to be Christian in both word and in deed. To love one's neighbour regardless of status, condition, religion or race. The mainspring for this approach to life is not human nature but God's calling. The object is not to bring glory to oneself but to fulfill one's Christian vocation and to commend the gospel to unbelievers.

Questions

1. What activities enhance your soul?
2. In what ways can you be a good neighbour to others?
3. Do you experience suspicion or hostility from others because of your faith?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, help me to be a good neighbour to all I meet this day. I ask you to watch over my neighbours and protect them from harm. Keep them safe and healthy, both physically and emotionally. I pray that you will bless us and them with your peace and especially with comfort during times of difficulty or hardship. I pray this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, 9 June

1 Peter 2.13 – 17

Honour Everyone

Many years ago, we had the privilege of visiting family friends in East Germany. This was not long before the wall came down. They were practising, faithful Christians and we often reflect how difficult it would have been to live out their faith under an oppressive regime. In East Germany at the time, practicing Christians were treated with suspicion and endured various penalties. The challenge was to adhere to Christian values in the light of 1 Peter 2:13 – 17. They would meet and worship in secret while also submitting to the laws of the government, knowing that it was illegal for them to proclaim Jesus to others, even at the risk of their lives.

Thankfully we live in a country where we are able to openly practice our faith without fear of retribution. But 1 Peter 2: 13 – 17 exhorts us to also obey and submit to the laws established by government leaders. Yes, this is true but our responsibility is to put God first and worship him in all that we do and say.

In Verse 17, Peter ends the paragraph with four instructions: To honour everyone, to love the family of believers, to fear God and to honour the Emperor. With these words Peter asks us also to honour everyone, to speak well of others without selfish motive, to treat others with dignity and respect and to be good citizens. He urges this approach because we are all created in the image of God. What wonderful words to live by!

Questions

1. How do Peter's words challenge you in relation to government laws or actions with which you do not agree?
2. How important is it to pray for and to support those Christians who live under persecution? Bring to mind these people in various countries throughout the world and pray for them.

Prayer

Lord, help us as we pray for those in authority. Grant to our governments and all who serve in public life, wisdom and skill, imagination and energy; protect them from corruption and the temptation of self-service. Help us all to commit ourselves to the common good. We submit our lives to you and call you our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Monday, 10 June

1 Peter 2.18 – 25

The Example of Christ

In this section, Peter starts briefly with a specific situation – in this case the suffering of slaves – and then quickly moves to draw out some general lessons for Christian life based on the suffering of Christ. Since many of the first Christians were slaves, this section of the letter is directly relevant. Most of these slaves were owned by pagan masters. During the time of the Roman Empire, the slave was chattel, wholly at the disposal of his master and without legal rights. The New Testament accepts this situation and never directly questions slavery. But within the Christian community the slave was given a new dignity since he or she was no longer treated as a possession but as a person made in the image of God and saved by the grace of God in Christ. Here was the impetus which would inspire later abolitionists, such as the devout Christian, William Wilberforce. Peter's instructions to slaves in our text draws on the example of Christ who took "the form of a slave" (Philippians 2:7) and bore punishments, reviling, beating and ultimately crucifixion. The underlying principle of Peter's advice to slaves is this: submission to one's masters is godly but fear of them and blind obedience is not. Peter's advice identifies the sufferings of Christ as an example for slaves to follow, but he quickly moves on to its redemptive value also as seen in the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:9. Christ is depicted not only as the one who through his death atones for sin, but also as

the one who protects, feeds and oversees the life of his people. Jesus is example (verses 18 - 22), redeemer (verse 24), shepherd and guardian (verse 25).

Questions

1. How relevant is Peter's advice to slaves in our time?
2. What encouragement does this teaching have for those who work for the ending of slavery in our world today?
3. Do you find the image of Jesus as shepherd and guardian comforting?

Prayer

Lord you are a God who sets the captives free. Your spirit searches restlessly for those in despair, that they may find the life you are calling them to. We pray for those being trafficked and callously put to work. On the cross, you were powerless and subject to the cruelty of others. Look with mercy on those who suffer in this way today.
Amen

Tuesday, 11 June

1 Peter 3.1 – 7

Wives and Husbands

We have always found these verses in 1 Peter 3 challenging and confronting. In a time where women are recognised as equal to men, in the time of the MeToo movement which confronts the issue of sexual harassment and promotes the equal role of women in the workplace and when many are campaigning for the rights of women to receive pay equality with men, the words of 1 Peter 3 seem somewhat outdated and archaic.

Moreover, at a time when many women are suffering violence at the hands of men, how important it is that respectful relationships between men and women be encouraged and taught.

These verses are a continuation of Peter's radical advice to Christians: that husbands and wives should be subject to one another. 'Wives are to accept the authority of your husbands' (Verse 1) and 'Husbands are to show consideration for your wives in your life together' (Verse 7). Peter describes what harmonious marriages should look like with husbands and wives equally serving one another to mutual benefit and with respect.

Peter then goes on to consider the nature of true beauty. True beauty does not come from the latest fashion or the latest brand but from a genuine relationship with the Lord. 'A gentle and quiet spirit' (Verse 4) flows from the kind of trust in the Lord that is only built by relationship with God. This passage doesn't forbid a woman from going to the hairdresser or from buying jewellery, but it does remind us not to look at the status symbols of modern life as a measure of a woman's worth. (The same principle can even apply to a man!). True beauty is not outward but is an inward quality of heart.

Questions

1. What has been a common misinterpretation of 1 Peter 3: 1 – 7?
2. How would you interpret Peter's advice to husbands and wives today?
3. How can respectful relations between men and women be fostered?

Prayer

Heavenly Father. Thank you for the wise instruction Peter gives us on the role of husbands and wives within Christian marriage. We hold up Christian couples throughout the world and pray that husbands and wives would seek to honour one another in their complimentary roles, with you at the centre of their relationship. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday 12 June

1 Peter 3.8 – 12

Suffering for Doing Right

Having offered advice to select groups within the Christian community (slaves, wives, husbands), Peter turns his attention to giving some general advice to the whole community of believers. The focus is on the internal life of the Church but also the way Christians relate to their pagan neighbours. Similar advice is offered elsewhere by Jesus himself (Matthew 5:5 - 7, 43 - 48) and by St. Paul (Romans 12:9 - 19). So far as how Christians relate to each other, Peter emphasises four values: unity, sympathy, compassion and humility. Peter then focuses on how his readers should respond when faced with hostility from non-Christians: "Do not return evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but on the contrary, bless" (1 Peter 3:9). The normal human reaction when faced with evil or abuse is to retaliate in kind, but here Peter advocates a radical alternative. It's an alternative response that is inspired by Jesus himself (Matthew 5: 38 - 48). Jesus blessed even those who nailed him to the cross. In like fashion, Peter is encouraging his readers to bless those who torment them. The ground for this good will is the mercy each one has received from God. Finally, Peter concludes his advice by quoting from Psalm 34:12 - 16, which offer some powerful words of comfort – God is ever ready to listen to the prayers of the righteous.

Questions

1. In your Church community do you observe the values of unity, sympathy, compassion and humility being lived out?
2. How difficult is it to bless those who mistreat you?
3. Are you conscious that you are a recipient of God's mercy and blessing?

Prayer

Loving Lord God, Lead us always into a place of repentance for any wrongdoing. Lead us always into a place of reconciliation for any pain. Give us always the grace to bless others. May encountering the truth of your love bring transformation. May we experience the abundance and blessings of your grace. Amen.

Thursday, 13 June

1 Peter 3.13 – 17

Do What is Good

The final two sections of 1 Peter for Week Two are about vindication in the face of evil and suffering. In the four verses for today we see an application of the quotation from Psalm 34 : 10 – 12, part of the reading from yesterday. The Church community as a whole is being addressed, for persecution threatens the very existence of the people of God and they must learn both how to suffer and the place of their sufferings in the purposes of God. Peter assures believers that if they endure persecution successfully they will ultimately be blessed. They are not to be afraid or be intimidated but rather are to “in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord”. The heart is the seat of the deeper emotions, the place where fear could reside, but where faith and reverence have their rightful home. The courage which springs from reverence for Christ and his sacrifice shows itself in a readiness to testify to him, even when under attack. So it is that Peter encourages his readers to always be ready to “make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you”. The readers, however, are to explain and defend their beliefs with “gentleness and reverence” and with a “clear conscience”. So he concludes: “It is better to suffer for doing good....than to suffer for doing evil”

It is perhaps hard for us to imagine what it must be like to live in a context of the constant threat of oppression and punishment for

your beliefs. However, we know that there are many people in the world for whom this is a daily reality.

Questions

1. How can we support those in our world today who are experiencing suffering for their faith?
2. Does fear or faith reside most readily in your heart?
3. Do you find it easy or difficult to share with others the Christian hope that you have?

Friday, 14 June

1 Peter 3.18 – 22

The Righteous for the Unrighteous

Peter now focuses on the role of Christ in suffering to “bring you to God”. He then goes on to develop an analogy centred on the Old Testament story of Noah and the flood. While speaking more and more openly about the harsh realities of persecution, Peter has been urging his readers to face their ordeals fearlessly and with confidence in God. Now he sketches the sure basis for that confidence: it comes as a consequence of the victory Christ has won by his death, resurrection and ascension. In this way, Christ has defeated the forces of sin and evil enabling believers to share in this victory through their baptism.

By way of parenthesis it seems, Peter invites his readers to consider what happened during the period between Christ’s death and resurrection. Here we enter into a much debated passage of scripture. But the text tells us simply that Christ descended to the underworld and proclaimed the Gospel to the spirits in prison there. Peter then goes on to remind his readers of the story of Noah and the family of eight who were delivered from the flood. Having made the transition to the story of Noah, it is natural to make the further transition that those who were saved then represent the Church

now. We enter the community of the Church through baptism and are encouraged to do so with the pledge of a “clear conscience”. Many of us have been baptised as infants and so could be thought of as lifelong Christians. However, the story of Noah and the flood encourages us to consciously embrace the meaning and effect of our Baptism in our lives today.

Questions

1. How does Christ’s death and resurrection defeat the forces of sin and evil?
2. How do you understand the proclamation to the spirits in prison?
3. What lesson do you draw from the story of Noah and the flood?
4. In what ways is your baptism important to you?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the precious gift of Baptism by which we are made members of the church and are called to share in its ministry. We ask for your goodness and blessings to be poured out upon us. We pray that you will work deeply within our hearts and souls to renew and refresh us each day. We pray this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflections on the Week

1. Why do you think Peter focuses on slaves, wives and husbands?
2. How convincing is Peter in arguing that suffering can be redemptive?
3. In what way does Peter draw upon the Old Testament to support his arguments? (Refer Psalm 34, Isaiah 53, Genesis 7)?
4. How would you describe the “hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15) to a non Christian?

The Rev'd Dr Timothy Gaden

My name is Tim Gaden. I was Canon Theologian in the Diocese of Ballarat 2014-2018 and now live in Gippsland where I am an examining chaplain and the ministry wellbeing and development coordinator. I have worked in parishes, schools, universities and theological colleges.

Saturday 15 June

1 Peter 4.1-6

The First Letter of Peter is, most likely, an early example of catechetical instruction, that is, a long sermon full of teaching for those who have just been baptised and are starting out in the Christian life. So, quite often, it draws contrasts between the way things were before and how they are now that these new Christians are member of the church, a distinction which would have been very fresh in the listeners' minds.

Today's reading tackles this transition head on. Once, Peter says, you spent all your time "in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry". But now, now that you are joined into the Body of Christ with your fellow Christians, your life is starting to be shaped by "the will of God" and by following Christ's example, ready to suffer as he suffered and to "live in the Spirit".

For “cradle Anglicans” (like me) it can be hard to recapture the vividness and urgency of a new convert that this passage draws upon. For most of us there was never a time we remember when we weren’t Christian. Even so, the message is pretty clear: getting baptised involves a whole 180 degree change of life. No “Church on Sunday and do what you like for the rest of the week” here. We are in a whole new life now that it takes a lifetime (new convert or not) to grow into.

Questions

1. Can you think of someone who has “suffered in the flesh” as Christ did (v. 1), setting an example of living the faith that you admire?
2. What is one concrete example of how “the will of God” (v. 2) might require a change for you right now?

Prayer points

- Pray for those recently converted to Christianity and newly baptised into the church.
- Pray for those who suffer for their faith in the Middle East and elsewhere, who pay a heavy price for being a Christian.

God of life and love,
thank you for the gift of my baptism,
the blessings of faith, the joy and peace of worship
the support of my brothers and sisters in Christ,
and the new life you offer.
Help me to grow day by day
into the fullness of that new life, in Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Sunday 16 June

1 Peter 4.7-11

Today Peter starts to unfold the specifics of this new life in Christ that is so different from the life the newly baptised have just left behind. Love, hospitality and service are the things he highlights. Loving each other stands at the centre of this new life (as it does elsewhere in the NT: "A new commandment I give you: love one another" – John 13:34), a love which "covers a multitude of sins", perhaps not so much the sins of the person loving, but rather the sins of the one who is being loved, just as a band-aid starts to heal a wound.

Hospitality towards others and making a welcoming space for their needs and concerns, in the midst of our own busy lives, is the glue that binds communities together.

Lastly, Peter also draws attention to the variety of different gifts that the Holy Spirit puts into the hearts and minds of Christians (cf. 1 Cor 12:4 ff; Rom 12:6 ff) and the importance of each person sharing their gifts within the Christian community. This sharing is described pointedly as "serving one another". We don't share these gifts with the intention of "big-noting" ourselves ("Look at me! Look at me!") but to build each other up as servants one of another, just like the Son of Man who came not be served but to serve. Jesus Christ is the example, but the Father supplies the energy, "the very words" we share, "the strength" we need.

The doxology, or short sentence of praise ("To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen." – v.11), shows that one section is ending here and a new section is about to start.

Questions

1. In your parish worship this morning, how many different gifts could you identify being offered?
2. What is your gift? How do you know? What is the gift for? How could you find out what your gift(s) is/are and is it important to find out?
3. Let your thinking roam free: Is there a particular way your parish or Christian community could be more hospitable to those who are different or on the edges of its life? What is it?
4. Love, hospitality, service. Which of these do you and your parish do best; which not so well?

Prayer points

- Give thanks for the people who offer their gifts to your parish community.
- Ask God to help those newer members to find a way to offer their gifts for the benefit of everyone.

God of all blessings,

you have given each of us gifts to use
as members of the body of Christ.

Here are our gifts – the work of our hands, our hearts, and our lives.

Give us the wisdom to discern our gifts
and the courage and strength to offer them
in the service of your church and world,
so that you may be glorified in all things
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Monday 17 June

1 Peter 4.12-19

In this new section Peter turns to the ways in which we might think about our suffering in the Christian life, and how it is connected to Christ's suffering. Our suffering is "a trial", which strengthens us; it is "nothing new", because Christ has walked this way before us; it is an opportunity for blessing, as the Spirit rests on us in our suffering. Of course, we must be careful here. We are only too conscious these days that calls to "suffer for Christ's sake" have been used to justify situations of abuse and injustice that are in no way part of the plan for God's children. Careful judgment is needed. Is this or that case of suffering really for the sake of the Gospel or really to prop up the stranglehold of an abuser?

Every now and then in the New Testament we come across words that only appear once. A word like this has a fancy Greek name, *hapax legomenon*, "being said once". Because it only appears once it can be hard to determine its exact meaning. We come across one at the end of v.15, translated in the NRSV as "mischief maker". This word, *allotriepiskopos*, which doesn't appear anywhere else in Greek literature before this instance in 1 Peter, seems literally to mean "someone who gets involved in other people's things." Ranking it alongside murder and theft shows how seriously Peter takes this as a problem in Christian community, both as a grab for power and as a sign of a lack of trust or patience in people to manage their own affairs.

Questions

1. As twenty-first century Australian Anglicans, are we really called to "suffer for Christ" in any meaningful way? What kinds of issues or situations might be an occasion for a witness of that kind?

2. Verse 17 reads, "For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God". What does the church today need to do to get its house in order to face God's judgement?

Prayer points

- Pray for those trapped in situations of abuse and oppression, in this country and overseas.
- Ask God for forgiveness and Amendment of life for those who get "involved in other people's things", in your own life and in the life of the parish.

God of all forgiveness and mercy,
watch over me in all my doings,
especially those I undertake in your name.
Help me to guard my tongue,
to avoid gossip and meddling in other people's business.
Help me to forgive those who meddle in mine.
May we only speak words that honour you
and build up those around us for your glory and
in the service of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday 18 June

1 Peter 5.1-4

Like a bishop who is preaching at an ordination service and who turns his or her face from the congregation to address the ordination candidates in particular, here Peter turns his face away from the newly baptised and towards the leadership of the church. The message comes targeted. And his message to the leaders? "Be good shepherds of the flock given into your charge, and lead not only with words but principally by your example."

In Australia farmers herd their sheep on horse or quadbike, rounding them up and driving them on from behind. In the Middle East, in Jesus' time and still today, shepherds go first, they lead their flock from the front by showing them the way, forging a path from the front which the sheep can follow. And just as in the reading two days ago, where Jesus was the example for the whole community's love towards one another, here "the chief pastor", the Good Shepherd, also sets the tone for leaders, providing in his life the example of forgiveness, inclusion, self-giving and healing behaviour that is the mark of Christian leadership.

This change of perspective from driving the sheep at the back to leading from the front is crucial. It's more than the important leadership principle: "never ask someone to do something you wouldn't be willing to do yourself". It's about leaders (bishops, clergy and lay leaders) shaping their lives on Christ's example in such a way that they become more immediate examples of discipleship that, in turn, shape the culture of the communities under their care. St Paul puts it like this: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). The value of imitating Paul hangs on his ability to emulate Christ.

Questions

1. How do you think leadership in the church and leadership outside the church in politics and industry differ? Do they? Should they? If so, how?
2. Who are “the elders” in your parish or organisational context? How does the way they exercise their leadership affect the community as a whole?

Prayer Points

- Pray for the leadership of your diocese and parish community in the responsibilities laid upon them.
- Pray for yourself in the opportunities before you to provide an example modelled on Christ.

God our Father

You have welcomed each one of us in Jesus
and called us to be his Body in this place;

Send your Holy Spirit on those called to leadership,
in this parish and in this diocese;

Fill them with vision, energy, and faithfulness in prayer,
and with a heart after your own heart,

that they may be wise and gentle shepherds of your people:

ready to serve us with joy, to build us up in faith,

and to lead us by the example of your son,

our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Wednesday 19 June

1 Peter 5.5-11

When the elders are shaping themselves carefully on Jesus' example (yesterday's reading), then younger members of the flock and the newly baptised can reliably look to them for guidance and an example worth following. Peter is careful to point out, lest there be any misunderstanding, that the dealings between leaders (elders) and those younger in years and in the faith must be based on humility; it's an authority of humility that the elders should have, not one of self-righteousness or arrogance.

In all the advice that Peter is offering to his community in this letter he is always quick to draw God into the conversation. And he does so here too in vv. 6-7. God is the one that we need ultimately to humble ourselves before and the one to whom we should bring our burdens and our anxiety. In our anxiety and even in our sufferings, God shows that care in the ways he "restores, supports, strengthens and establishes" us.

The experience of this support strengthens us to resist the devil who is always prowling around "like a roaring lion..., looking for someone to devour." This is the only mention of the evil one in the letter, a reticence that matches the testimony of scripture as a whole. Human hearts are often source enough for the things that go wrong without needing any appeal to a personification of evil. As a whole, scripture leaves little opportunity for people to claim "the devil made me do it" as a way to escape responsibility for their actions.

Questions

1. Can you think of any examples in the Bible of people who humbled themselves and God exalted them?
2. Can you think of any examples (perhaps to share if in a group) of times when God sent people, thoughts or events to "restore, support, strengthen and establish" you?

Prayer points

- Pray for all those who are new in the faith or new in the parish, that they will find acceptance, a sense of belonging and be valued for what they offer.
- Pray for strength in the areas where you are prone to temptation, ready to do things that you know you should not do.

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
That my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
That my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
That I love but what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
To defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,
That I always may be holy.

- *St Augustine (354-430 CE)*

Thursday 20 June

1 Peter 5.12-14

Peter draws this letter to a close with the customary farewells. The mention of individuals (Silvanus, Mark) and communities (the church in Babylon) is a reminder of how interwoven Christian communities are, in Peter's time and still today. We heard at Easter the story of Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Christ in the garden, and her joy in rushing to the others and telling them the good news of the risen Christ. This act was the first proclamation of the resurrection, and earned her the title of *apostola apostolorum*, "the apostle to the apostles". Here we see the ripple effect of Mary's first proclamation which brought Silvanus, Mark, the church to which Peter is writing and the Babylonian church to faith as well, ripples that widen out, as each generation shares the good news with the generation to come, through the 42 generations between Mary and us, even as far as Victoria, over 13,000 kms from the Easter garden in Jerusalem.

Most of us, just like Peter's community, whether we are cradle Anglicans or recent converts, have received our faith as a gift, a gift from those who showed us the risen Christ in their words and actions. In my case, I learnt my first lessons in the love and forgiveness that leads to new life from my mother, then from my wife. From a friend at university I learnt my most important lessons about thirsting for justice and inclusion, and from my daughter, who would run a mile if you suggested she was a Christian, I learnt lessons in faithfulness and persistence that echo and enhance God's call to me throughout my life. More lessons in resilience and patience, prayer and joyfulness waited for me in the parishes where I worshipped and served.

Your story will feature different people but it will still be a story full of people who have given you the gift of faith, those who have inspired and encouraged you, and parish communities, full of saints. We are all bound together into God's story.

Questions

1. Who are the people who gave you the gift of faith and the people who have strengthened it, inspired and grown it over the years?
2. If you could greet three (or four) people with “a kiss of love” from whom you are separated now by disagreement, distance or death, who would they be?

Prayer points

- Give thanks for those who brought you to faith and who strengthened your faith.
- Pray for the next generation and for their coming to faith.

God of life and love,
thank you for the love that brought Mary to the tomb in tears and took her away in joy.

Thank you for her faithfulness in sharing the good news of your risen Son with the disciples.

Thank you for those in my life whose words and actions have shown me the risen Christ and strengthened me in the faith and love that joins me to so many people.

May we, in our turn, continue to show your love and Easter new life to all through our words and actions each day. Amen.

Friday 21 June

2 Peter 1.1-2

Today we begin reading a new letter, one that focusses not so much on the faith of the newly baptised as 1 Peter did, but rather on Christ and who he is (chapter 1), on what that means for the way we live our lives (chapter 2) and on eschatology (what will happen when Jesus returns in judgement) and why this is taking longer than the first Christians thought (chapter 3), and on the connections between these three things.

2 Peter is relatively neglected in the life of the church. Passages from it are only read twice on Sundays over the whole three year cycle of our lectionary, on the Feast of the Transfiguration in Year A and on the Second Sunday of Advent in Year B. There are many arguments among biblical scholars about the date of this letter (anywhere from 60 CE to 150 CE), about who wrote it and about where it was written, but at the end of the day, here it is, in holy scripture, to nurture our faith, prayer life and discipleship.

It begins, as yesterday's reading at the end of 1 Peter closed, with customary greetings and good wishes, and both passages in particular mention grace and peace. Here, the authors follow Paul's example, who begins all his letters with some variation of grace and peace. Paul chose these two words carefully. Christianity is grounded in God's grace. We are saved by grace alone. Christianity also is the fulfillment of *shalom*, the Hebrew word for peace, God's vision of a world full of justice and inclusion where the wolf lays down with the lamb (Isa 11:6) and new life is breaking through for all creation in the risen Christ. It's an excellent two word summary of the whole Christian life.

Questions

1. How does the church (and your parish) bear witness to God's vision of inclusion and justice that are summed up in the word *shalom*?
2. Lots of ink and blood have been shed in the history of the church over the phrase "salvation by grace alone". What do these words mean to you?

Prayer points

- Pray for members of all the different churches in your suburb/town, all joined together by the life of grace and peace that we share.
- Ask God's blessing on those who translate the bible in new languages and versions so that people can hear the good news in their own tongue.

Almighty, Ever-living God,
most Merciful and Compassionate,
we thank you for creation and the life you have given us.
Bless all the people of faith in the community where I live,
who invoke you by different names and prayers.
Make us instruments of your light, your love and your peace.
Guide us to walk always in your path
and be a source of hope to the world around us.
Give us the strength to bear witness to your vision of peace,
and courage to bear witness to the truth of your grace in our lives.
Amen.

The Communion Forest in Week 3

In 1 Peter 4:3 Peter lists all the things that the Gentiles (here, non-Christians) like to do – “living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry”. There is no ecological sin or transgression in this list. If we were to add one, being more aware now of the importance of being green, for our planet and for future generations, what would it be?

“For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God” (1 Pet 4:17). How will your parish fare in the judgement to come on its ecological responsibility? What are you doing well? What could you do better?

At the end of 1 Peter, we are reminded of the networks, relationships and interconnections that bind Peter’s community to other Christians. What are the churches in your town / suburb doing together to promote sustainability and renewables? What could they be doing?

In 1 Pet 5:12-14 and 2 Pet 1:2 mention is made of peace, or in Hebrew, *shalom*. Spend ten minutes googling the meaning of *shalom* as a vision of God’s wholeness and share what you have discovered.

Prayer

Creator God,
you formed us from the dust of the earth,
and you reveal your finger prints in all flesh.
Teach us your deep wisdom,
in the order and beauty of all that you have made.
When our care of your creation is found wanting,
reprove and reform us,
so that our footprints may be more gentle upon the earth,
tending and keeping it as your own handiwork;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev'd Dr Dean Spalding

My name is Dean Spalding, I'm currently the Rector of Trafalgar (including Yarragon and Thorpdale) in the Diocese of Gippsland. I'm married to Kate and have three daughters. I'm looking forward to sharing some reflections and prayers with you for the next nine days on passages from 2 Peter.

Saturday 22 June

2 Peter 1.3-11

Thank you to Revd. Tim Gaden for opening 2 Peter with us yesterday.

A brief 'foreword' about an approach to 2 Peter. Whether written by Simon Peter himself, or with the assistance of another writer, or by a devotee of Peter's, somewhat 'down the track', is not immaterial—but in terms of approach, I will assume that the writer intends the reader to interpret the letter in the narrative light of being, in some sense, *from Peter*. A good example is the evoking of Jesus' transfiguration in 1:17-18 as an eye-witnessed event. Bearing in mind what we know of Peter as we read the letter increases its potency to achieve its writer's intention to *remind* us of truths we already know (1 Pet 1:12,13, 15; 3:1-3). Remembering is such an important safe-guarding activity: the knowledge of Christ will protect the believer from the teachings of false-teachers; give them endurance as they wait with patience for the return of the Lord (*parousia*); inspire them to acts of love and mutual affection; and thus, prevent them becoming ineffective and unfruitful.

In today's set portion of the letter (1:3-11) there is a bookended structure that suggests that our "efforts" in life, love and faith are completely enveloped from beginning to end with God's gracious gifting and provision. Gift (1:3-4): effort (1:5-10): *gift* (1:11).

I love the rhythmic flow of the simple catena or chain in the middle of that sandwich (our "effort"). Peter's chain puts me in mind of Paul's chain in Romans 5:3-5 (the chain that ends "character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.") When we add our effort to the all-encompassing gracious gift of God, we support our faith, and confirm our calling—a calling which is also a gift of God. If we allow it, Peter's use of the word "call" (1:10) can evoke that rich and highly visual account of the "Calling of Simon Peter" from Luke 5:1-11 (a recommended companion read).

Questions

1. Names and first words are so important. Why do you suppose the writer is evoking the full double-barrelled name Simeon (his formal, conservative, Jewish name—used by the first church council when talking about Peter's testimony, Acts 15:14) and Petros ('Peter', his Greek or gentile 'nickname' meaning "Rock", given him by Jesus (Matthew 16:13-20)?
2. In you own faith-journey what parts do you identify as pure unmerited gift from God? How do you see the relationship between what you bring to the table (your efforts) and what God brings?

Prayer points

- Thank God for every good gift freely given to you.
- Ask God to help you to do your part well.

Prevent [i.e. "Go before"] us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help, that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Sunday 23 June

2 Peter 1.12-18

Here, Peter makes clear his intention to *remind* his reader of the important truths that they already know. This theme of *remembering* is a theme that the writer will return to in Chapter 3 (3:1-2).

Remembering what God has done for us in Christ provides a foundational safe-guard against false-teachings. And so, Peter writes that he intends to keep on *reminding* his readers of all "these things" (1 Peter 1:12)—the many gracious gifts of God towards those who have been called. Peter considers it "right, as long as I am in this tent, to refresh your memory." Peter uses the metaphor of "tent" in reference to his body in the same way Paul uses "temple". "Tent" carries with it the further sense of portability and impermanence. The latter is emphasised when Peter speaks of his imminent death as "putting off my tent".

Peter's knowledge of his impending death gives the letter poignance and a sense of the costliness of Peter's witness. "I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things." "Departure" (*exodon*) evokes the way that Jesus spoke of his death, resurrection, and ascension (Luke 9:31) in the midst of the transfiguration narrative. It lends Peter's letter a note of "farewell", like Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders in Miletus ("Now I know that none of you...will ever see my face again", Acts 20:22—a passage filled with instruction). Anticipated last farewells and instruction are typical companions in scripture as in life (by reason of its position in the second Gospel, Mark 13 is a good example of this connection).

Before Peter speaks explicitly of the false prophets in Chapter 2, he speaks of the utter reliability regarding his message as an eyewitness to the things God did for us through Christ. To paraphrase 1:16, Peter and his fellow messengers “did not make this stuff up”! Peter recalls the voice of God speaking of Jesus on the mount of the transfiguration (“the holy mountain”)—one of the most well-attested accounts of the synoptic gospels (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35).

Questions

1. How does it affect you to read that this is one of the last testimonies of a man who knows that his days in this world are numbered?
2. Have you ever experienced a transfiguration moment or an epiphany? Have you written it down and shared it with others?

Prayer points

- Teach us to number our days and to proclaim your messages as our last day draws nearer.

So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

Turn, O Lord! How long?

Have compassion on your servants!

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,

so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,

and for as many years as we have seen evil.

Let your work be manifest to your servants,

and your glorious power to their children.

Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us,

and prosper for us the work of our hands—

O prosper the work of our hands!

Psalm 90:12-17

Monday 24 June

2 Peter 1.19-21

Peter also explains that every message that is the prophetic word of God is not merely a product of human will but of God's inspiration—"men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (1:21). The theme of the inspiration of the prophetic word of God including those written down in the scriptures is briefly again alluded to in the closing comments of the letter where Peter affirms the writing of Paul's letters as scripture—while at the same time offering the opinion that some things in Paul's letters are difficult to understand and susceptible to misinterpretation by the "ignorant and unstable" (2 Pet 3:15b-16)!

How appropriate to read this affirmation of the prophetic on the day of celebration of the Birth of John the Baptist! Jesus acknowledges John as the greatest of the prophets (Matthew 11: 9, 11 "What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet... Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist.") John's father Zechariah's also sings a prophetic song upon being filled with the Holy Spirit at John's birth—a section of which (Luke 1:76-79) has great resonance with this part of Peter's letter (2 Pet 1:19).

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." Luke 1:76-9

“We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” 2 Pet 1:19

What is Peter’s conclusion about the words spoken by the prophets including the scriptures? “You will do well to be attentive!”

Questions

1. How firm are you in your conviction that “all scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16a)? And what do you understand by this phrase (2 Tim 3:16a) and the phrase used by Peter in 2 Pet 1:21 (“men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God”)?

Prayer points

- May your word dwell in us and bear much fruit to your glory— as a lamp shining in a dark place.

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Tuesday 25 June

2 Peter 2.1-3

The true prophets brought words that were “a light shining in a dark place”. Alas, they are not the only ones to arise among the people! “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions.” How will we know such false teachers? Their opinions will be destructive. They will deny Jesus (the “Master” or “Lord”). This word for “deny” (*aparneomai/ arneomai*) must have been a hard one for Peter to write given that the most well-attested story about him is his denial of Jesus (Matt 26:30,70,72,75 Mark 14:30,68,70,72; Luke 22:34, 57,61; John 13:38;18:25,27). Simon Peter’s return from the denial was prophesied (Luke 22:31-32, John 13:36), and was coupled in one prophecy that when he was restored he would be called on to strengthen his brothers and sisters (*adelphoi*) which is precisely what we hear him doing in this letter (2 Peter 1:10).

False teaching can take many forms. In reading the whole letter it seems possible that the particular form that Peter was addressing was perhaps an “antinomianism” based on a misinterpretation of some of Paul’s harder teachings (2 Pet 3:16). The false teachers have persuaded themselves that Christ as the “end of the law” (Rom 10:4) means they can do as they like! Perhaps Peter is alluding to these false teachers when he writes of the residents of Sodom who distressed Lot with the “licentiousness of the lawless” and at the very end of the letter Peter warns them not to be “carried away with the error of the lawless” (2 Pet 3:17).

Peter will go into more detail about the false teaching in the latter parts of Chapter Two, but for the purpose of today’s reading portion, it is enough to note that there is some “denial” of the full nature of Christ as taught in the four canonical gospels, expanded in the rest of the New Testament and distilled into the orthodox creeds (Apostles, Nicene and Athanasian).

Questions

1. Can you identify in our times where a less than full appreciation of Christ's nature has brought destruction or division? (Recall what Athanasius says of the Trinity—"But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son , and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.")
2. Are there other distortions of revealed truth that have caused the way of truth to be maligned?

Prayer points

- Pray for the work of men and women teachers, preachers, theologians, and 'doctors of the church', teachers in Bible colleges and theological schools—that they might with boldness teach truth according to the wisdom given to them.
- Pray for all believers to take up the daily reading of scriptures in their heart languages.

Almighty God,
who gives to your servants who are theologians or teachers
special gifts of grace to understand and teach
the truth in Christ Jesus:
grant that, enlightened by their teaching,
we may know you, the one true God,
and Jesus Christ whom you have sent
who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wednesday 26 June

2 Peter 2.4-10

Aside: The last verse of yesterday's reading, today's and tomorrow's—essentially all of Chapter 2 and the verse 3:3—have a striking similarity to the Letter of Jude, the second last book in the New Testament. I must confess, that biblical scholars (for whom we prayed just yesterday) have perhaps spilled too much ink on theories of literary influence and dependence (who copied whom, if there was a third unknown common source). We do this with the Synoptic Gospels as well. The discussions, though enlightening for some, make little difference at the coal-face! Except to say, that in Jude, we have a useful go-to "commentary" for 2 Peter 2, which may prove useful where, say, Jude elaborates on something which Peter more briefly includes (or vice versa). Jude and 2 Peter 2 are also replete with references to the OT (e.g. Genesis and Numbers) and other non-canonical literature (like the Book of Enoch) and these too become useful "commentaries" to consult if we desire a fuller "back story".

Our portion today is really just one long sentence—it's easy to lose track of this as each contingent clause ("if...") has a riveting (and unusual) narrative behind it. To help see the structure of the sentence it might be helpful to leave out the detail.

If God punished this group, and this group, but saved this group (who found living among the last-mentioned group an ordeal), and punished this group, but rescued this one (who found living among the last-mentioned group an ordeal), THEN (verse 9) the Lord (by implication TODAY) knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous held-over in punishment until the day of judgment.

The passage detours through two sections of ancient stories that make the interpretation *difficult*—one is the gap-ridden narrative of Genesis 6:1-4 where it would appear to give an account of male angelic beings having sex with female humans and producing a hybrid offspring—the Nephilim—including “heroes of old, warriors of renown”—a time just prior to Noah’s flood in which “every inclination of the thoughts of the heart was only evil continually.” And Genesis 19 where again humans desire to have sex with male angelic beings (unaware that they were angels?). *And Peter said Paul was sometimes difficult to interpret!* Looking beyond the preamble of unusual biblical precedents, Peter’s take-home point lies on more accessible ground—“the Lord still knows how to rescue the godly from trial” and will hold-over the unrighteous to judge all things rightly on that final day.

Questions

1. Which provides you with greater consolation: that God still knows how to rescue the godly from trial; or, that, on the final day of judgment, God will judge all things rightly?

Prayer

(Some in the communion celebrate the eucharist on Wednesdays and this prayer seemed appropriate to the reading)

We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen

Thursday June 27

2 Peter 2.11-22

“Whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not bring against them a slanderous judgement from the Lord.” This is one of those helpful instances where a little extra illustration from Jude can be helpful. Jude writes (Jude 9-11a):

“⁹ But when the archangel Michael contended with the devil and disputed about the body of Moses, he did not dare to bring a condemnation of slander against him, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’ ¹⁰ But these people slander whatever they do not understand... ^{11a} Woe to them!”

Again, Peter’s advice is not to speak slander or words of judgment—even against the false-teachers. Judgment is the Lord’s. Even the angels don’t bring slanderous judgments—not even against the devil—but defer judgment to God alone. To re-cycle an easier part of Peter: “You will do well to be attentive to this.” Refrain from prophetic judgment. One of Jesus’ most clear commands was: “Do not judge.” (Matt 47:1; Luke 6:37-38). And yet it is perhaps the most frequently ignored by us who claim to follow the Master. Jesus’ other clear command is for his followers to love one another and to love their enemy.

Sometimes notwithstanding the command not to judge—the people of God need to be provided a portrait of a perpetrator (in this case the false teacher) so that they might recognise who may present a danger to the community. Peter suggests that we might recognise them by their slander (“they slander what they do not understand”). Also “They have hearts trained in greed.” Like Balaam, whose “speechless donkey spoke” to him, they put monetary gain above doing the right thing.

Like Jude, Peter uses some evocative metaphors to describe false teachers: "They are like waterless springs". Jude uses similar metaphors (Jude 12): "They are shepherds who feed only themselves."; "They are waterless clouds carried along with the wind." (*I confess that that's often how graduates of theological colleges operate when we get to parishes and share information like yesterday's "Aside"!*) "They are autumn trees without fruit and uprooted" All of these things have the right form, but they don't deliver what they were designed to deliver.

Questions

1. The Christian academy seems to lead Biblical study with issues such as author, date, provenance, source-criticism, purpose, and translation issues? In your experience, do these 'help' or 'get in the way of' hearing what God has to say to us through scripture?

Prayer points

- Pray for theological students (young and old) as they absorb much technical information and seek to integrate the message into one relevant for ordinary folk seeking to follow Christ. (And forgive bible study writers whose technical stuff 'gets in the way'!)

From Thursday's Morning Prayer, to follow the Psalms (in AAPB), and relevant to 2 Peter 1:4

Almighty God, who wonderfully created us in your own image and yet more wonderfully restored us in your Son Jesus Christ: grant that, as he came to share our human nature, so we may be partakers in his divine glory; who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Friday 28 June

2 Peter 3.1-2

The opening of today's reading portion (*agapētoi* – "beloved" or "dear friends") is an expression by which Peter addresses the letter's recipients in this closing portion of the letter four times (3:1,8,14,17). It makes one mindful that Peter sees himself as a slave of Christ (1:1), but that Jesus has told him at their last gathering before his arrest that he no longer calls the disciples slaves (or servants) but friends (John 15:15).

This letter and an earlier one sent from Peter (possibly, but not probably, our "1 Peter") had the same purpose—to serve as reminders which in this letter brings us back to an early statement of purpose in 1:12-15 (which mentioned 'reminder', 'refresh', 'recall'). And why are they to remember? To encourage wholesome thinking. Thinking! An activity under threat in an age of sound-bite media, algorithms that relegate folk to echo-chambers of mutual certitude, and reality TV. What does Peter want them to remember? "The words spoken in the past by the holy prophets" by which Peter most likely means the Hebrew scriptures; and the commandments of Jesus and spoken to them through "your apostles", words which Peter is placing alongside the earlier category of scripture. (The latter could reference the project of Mark's Gospel.)

"Your apostles" seems a humble and service-focussed way by which Peter refers to himself and his fellow apostles. An appropriate companion-read to this brief passage this morning would be the reconciliatory commissioning of Peter in John 21:15-19 ("Do you love me?" "Feed my sheep")

Questions

1. How can we foster greater depth of thought in the Christian community today?
2. Is “wholesome thought” sufficiently captured by Paul’s list in the close of his Letter to the Ephesians (“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any *excellence* and if there is *anything worthy of praise*, think about these things.”)
3. Is it sufficient to think only in terms of this Pauline list?

Prayer points

- Pray for depth of thinking among Christians today in all areas of life.
- Pray for obedience to the clear commandments of Jesus (for instance, love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, love your neighbour as yourself, love your enemies, do not judge, do not condemn, do to others as you would have them do to you)

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen.

Saturday June 29

2 Peter 3:3-10

³ First of all you must understand this, that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts ⁴ and saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming?'

These are the last two verses that make a close parallel to Jude 4-18 (These verses correspond closely to Jude 17-18.) But whereas in Jude this is only a few final exhortations and a beautiful doxology ("Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling...") away from the end...Peter expands upon the "scoffers" and opens up the subject of their ridicule—the 'return of Christ' (or parousia) as something that has not happened yet and therefore, in the scoffers' cynical opinion, will never happen. Peter cites an example of their scoffing:

'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!'

This scoffing resulted from a philosophical belief in a static and never-changing world. Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BCE) had already tried to shift people's appreciation to the fact that everything was in a state of flux or change, but his was still a minority view in the time of Jesus and Peter.

Today, however, after the Industrial Revolution, after Hiroshima, in the midst of an Information Revolution, with the growing acceptance of anthropogenic climate change and the detection of cataclysmic events in the geological history of earth (like the meteor that formed the Chicxulub crater and probably drove the non-avian dinosaurs to extinction) we can see the potential for the troubling prophecy that "the earth has been reserved for fire". Our hope remains that the "word of God" which did the creating in the beginning is the same "word of God" that directs the return of Christ and any other end time events. This must never be read in a simplistic, literal way to suggest that, since the present world "will burn", humanity's God-

given commission to care for creation is redundant (Gen 1:28; 2:8,15). To quote Michael Green from his Tyndale Commentary on 2 Peter, "Peter's assurance that these things are not governed by rationalistic presumption or chance, but by divine control, is the ultimate justification for retaining hope in the midst of a crazy world. God is in control. Final doom is no more inevitable for our world than it was for Nineveh, if, like the [people] of Nineveh, we humble ourselves and repent."

Questions

1. To quote Michael Green again. "The whole idea of cosmic conflagration belongs to the apocalyptic imagery, and that is a sphere where literalism is always dangerous". How do you respond to this quotation? What do you think?
2. How do you argue against destructive "disposable earth" theology?

Prayer point

- Pray for the World Vision project called "Famer Managed Natural Regeneration". If you don't know what FMNR is, "google" it and watch some videos, before you pray.

Sunday June 30

2 Peter 3:11-18

With the complex end times writings (3:4-10) we considered yesterday we skipped past two important points. Peter's comment "With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day" speaks firstly of God's close-grained attention to everything that transpires in a single day in the cosmos; and then of God's eternal perspective from which the millennia of Christ's delay looks short. To these ideas of God's perspective on time (with scriptural connection to Psalm 90:4) Peter adds the idea of the *patience* of the Lord in the delay to allow the opportunity for more to take up the offer of salvation. This leads to some of the most comforting of all Peter's writing: "The Lord is not wanting any to perish, but for all to come to repentance." (2 Pet 3:9). This tempers the "earth will burn" theology and reminds us that, in the midst of the great flood, God rescued eight people and a good many animals also; that through the sulphur that rained upon Sodom, God rescued Lot and his daughters, and that the Lord still knows how to rescue from trial. From this we could take refuge in Isaiah 43:2: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." We must but remain in Christ, leading lives of holiness and godliness (v 11).

Make every effort (or "strive") to be at "peace" adds a sense of closure to these exhortations in the letter's conclusion. Believers were to "make every effort" to support their faith with that chain of characteristics we examined on Day 1 (2 Pet 1:5); Peter was going to "make every effort" (prior to his 'departure') to make provision that would allow believers "at any time to recall these things" (2 Pet 1:15—commentator Michael Green, using opinions of early 'Church Fathers' Papias, Clement and Irenaeus, thinks that Peter may, here, have been referring to the passing on of his preaching to Mark to include in his Gospel. While waiting for Christ's return believers are

to be at peace—this recalls the opening of the Letter (with its “may grace and peace be yours..” greeting, 1:2); they are not to be like the “blots and blemishes” of the false teachers, but rather without “spot or blemish” and they are to regard the delay of Parousia as God’s patience and for an opportunity for more instances of salvation.

The comments of Peter about Paul and his writings need not challenge genuine authorship by Peter (see Michael Green’s Tyndale Commentary p. 30 for a persuasive argument for “authenticity”). But when I read what Peter writes “There are some things in [Paul’s writings] that are hard”, I must confess to you (my reader!) that an unkind thought crossed my mind. Having just spent nine days grappling with Peter’s cross referencing to what must be some of the most obscure passages in the Hebrew scriptures (for example Balaam’s “speechless donkey who spoke”; the angels with sexual intentions towards human women in Genesis 6:1-4) I have to confess that I sometimes thought that that was possibly “the pot calling the kettle black”!

Still, I hope the difficulties have been worth it for the readers of these studies and that you might agree that 2 Peter has much to teach the contemporary church.

We could receive Peter’s final two verses as a blessing of our own.

May you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen

Also for Sunday June 30

The Communion Forest in Week 4

1. "The Lord is not wanting any to perish" (2 Pet 3:9a). As one who spent part of my childhood growing up in Mauritius from whence the flightless Dodo 'departed' this world for ever, and another part of my childhood growing up in Tasmania from whence the thylacine disappeared, I wonder, *does the Lord's desire to see none perish apply to endangered species?* If God is the creator of all—express reasons why the Lord "not wanting any to perish—would also not want to see the extinction of any creature through human activity. We could enlist the flood narrative as support if we answer in the affirmative.
2. In 2 Peter, flood and fire are often metaphors for destruction and judgment. But they can also be metaphors for cleansing and renewal (consider the 'refining of gold' metaphor in 1 Peter 1:7). Flood and fire in Australia in recent decades are increasingly instruments of death and destruction. But then there are some ecological communities that only regenerate (become "new" again) through flood (like the River Red Gum forests of Barmah) or through moderate fire (like our native grass-trees and some banksia species). Before Western colonisation, fires in Australia were more frequent but less intense. Find out if there is a land management by First Nations people in your district, and if there are ways to support Aboriginal Land Management.
3. As his time of "departure" (*exodus* – death) approaches, Peter's mind turns to the "remembering", "reminding" and "refreshing" of those younger generations who need to hear stories of redemption. From an environmental perspective, are their creative ways that our "departures" can be used to make the planet a more hospitable place? That we might not be haunted by Jude's vision of "fruitless trees uprooted", are there ways

toward a time in which the earth can bring forth its abundant fruit in sustainable ways?

4. In terms of environment or sustainability are their important messages we should pass on before we 'depart' this mortal coil?
5. In terms of "putting off our tents" (our bodies) are there more sustainable ways in which we could approach funerals and committal of our mortal remains to the earth?
6. "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of a man" writes St Peter. Tony Rinaudo who was instrumental in the revegetation of Niger over the last three decades believes it was his response to a revelation given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that led to the development of his highly successful "Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration" now supported by World Vision. Find out how a word from God, while letting the air pressure down in tyres (in order to cross some sandy terrain), proved to be a turning point in this expanding movement of re-forestation.

AND THE NEXT STEP IS ...

If the Bible Challenge has whetted your appetite to continue exploring what the Bible has to say to modern Christians, there will be a good opportunity to do so in July. Rev Dr Mark Garner will lead a series of studies, “On this rock I will build my church”, in which we will discuss Peter’s letters in depth. Everyone is welcome to participate, either in-person or via Zoom. The in-person sessions will be on Mondays 15th, 22nd, 29th July; and 5th August, from 5.30—6.30 p.m., in Synod Hall. Zoom sessions will be on Wednesdays 17th, 24th, 31st July; and 7th August, from 5.30—6.30 p.m. If you would like to join the discussions, please let Fr Mark know (markwjgarner@gmail.com)

Your Notes

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**Ministry
Development**