



**OUR LIVING HOPE:
LESSONS FROM 1ST PETER**
Mid week Bible Study, 2020 with
Pastor Hetrick

BACKGROUND:

In the Sundays between Resurrection of Our Lord and Pentecost this year, our Lectionary lesson from the New Testament focuses upon verses from the Epistle known as 1st Peter. If ever there was a time to delve into this proclamation of living hope in Christ amidst challenges it surely is now.

A. Themes in 1st Peter:

- i. Being protected, reborn, healed, delivered, healed, and made alive in spirit infuse this letter to the church.
- ii. Being encouraged to believe even when we cannot see, to love earnestly, live with endurance by Christ's example, serve God, and be ready to tell others the source of our hope are lifted up as responses to the reality of the resurrection.
- iii. This epistle candidly acknowledges the existence of trials, suffering, hardship and the separation of sin that shows up in deceit, hypocrisy, envy, dark places, injustice and serves to bolster those who are struggling to hold onto the truth about God and about themselves as recipients of God's love and mercy, salvation and care.

FOR WHOM AND BY WHOM IS THIS LETTER WRITTEN?

It is evident the author knows that those reading the letter suffer disfavor and persecution at the hands of those who do not share the Christian faith. It is not clear exactly where the community who received this letter may have been, nor is it entirely clear who may have written this letter. In all likelihood, this is a pseudonymous writing, by someone in the style of Simon Peter. This is because there are no clear historical event that pin this letter to the time in which Simon Peter was living, nor is there anything in the letter that is clearly identified with him. The intent of the letter is to be of the apostolic tradition associated with Simon Peter.

A word about persecutions that are referenced in this letter:



There are questions as to the kind of persecution experienced- whether it was official Roman policy or unofficial activity, widespread or localized. There is much erroneous assumption about the general Roman attitude toward non-Roman religions. This is not to say that persecution did not take place, but it must also be noted that even when a policy was enunciated, it was not uniformly followed nor equally applied. Different emperors and different regions implemented different applications. The picture to the left

depicts symbolic ways early Christians used to communicate safely.

Historically, foreign religious customs were permitted by policy to be practiced to the extent they were ancestral and did not pose a threat to Roman rule. Over time Roman attitudes towards the Jews and their practices ranged from protection to annoyance to outright suppression. Under Julius Caesar Jews were granted certain privileges relating to practice of their religion which were affirmed under succeeding emperors.

But there was an abiding distaste that periodically resulted in official policies. Tiberius forbade certain rites, banning large numbers of those practicing them. Claudius forbade mass meetings fearing they would foment trouble. Vespasian levied a tax specifically upon the Jews while also continuing certain privileges.

The distaste for the Jews transferred to the Christians who unlike the Jews could not claim that their religion was ancestral.

Roman society also had organized groups called collegia, which were formed to promote a common interest, be it commercial, cultural, social, , sports, even geographic origin. They were sponsored by a prominent citizen and had a god or gods with which they were connected. They held regular meetings, gathered over a meal, were expected to pay dues and had a governing structure to pursue their common interest. Because these groups could undermine the ruler, emperors feared them and tried to ban them.

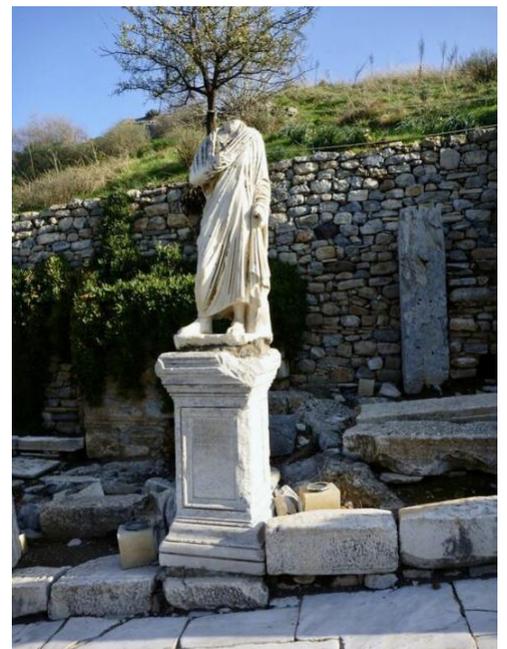
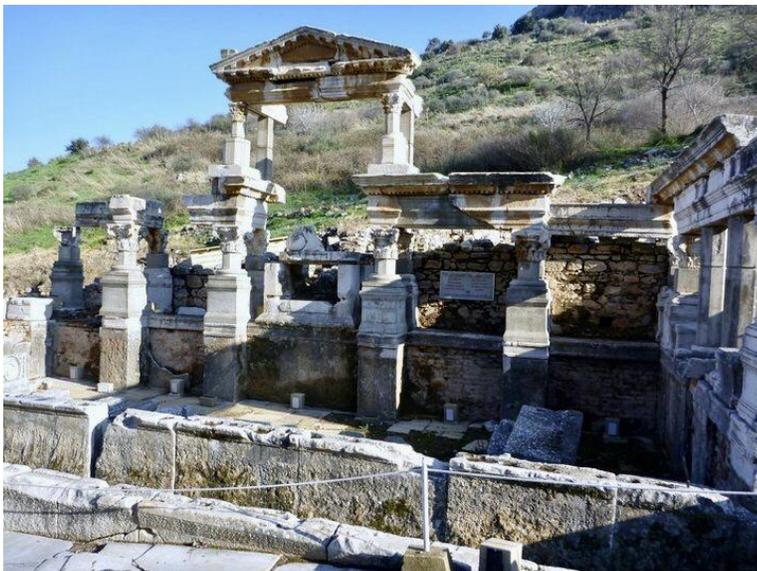
It may be that early confrontations arose because the Christians looked more like a collegia to be mistrusted.

Finally, in the mid first to early second century, there was a practice of according divine honors to the emperor. The imperial cult grew in importance and by the third century Decius coupled a political loyalty oath with imperial cult worship. This practice was far

more prevalent in Asia Minor than in Rome.

Asia Minor is shown on the map to the left as the area to the right hand side- to the east of Greece, in the area we would consider to be Turkey today. This is also the area for the apostle Paul's travels and the churches of the Book of Revelation.

In Asia Minor, a challenge to the emperor cult was seen as a challenge not only to Roman rule, but a threat to the very social fabric built around it, thus increasing the likelihood of persecution for those who rejected such a cult.



Throughout Asia Minor, temples to gods and emperors dot the landscape. It was not uncommon for worship and giving to be expected or even compelled.

So what about us today? We are not experiencing persecution, yet the larger themes are still relevant and helpful today. How do we endure times of suffering, whether they are actual or potential? 1st Peter tells us that the antidote is hope- not hope we must conjure out of our own selves, but the hope we know because of who Christ was, and is, and therefore what we can turn to today and in the future. Additionally, we should be a community centered around the reality Christ, for one another.

We are given a new life- this is a blessing for us and a new way of living- we as Christians are given both encouragement and tasks to take up to reflect the new reality of Jesus life, death and resurrection. Through it all we are assured- God is with you, and for you- there will be joy amidst struggles- lean upon your faith and believe.

1st Peter 1:3-9

Living hope for you



I have highlighted parts of the passage below in two different colors- yellow and blue. The yellow passages proclaim new birth, resurrection and salvation as the source of our hope. They bookend the blue passages to tell us that even though what we see and experience seems so different, two things can sustain us and one can encourage us.

First, we are given a living hope. Christ is alive! Christ is our hope.

Second, we are given a new birth into a new reality through Christ's resurrection.

Finally, remember that your salvation is assured. God has not forgotten you.

Between the first two things and the last is acknowledgment that it is hard to remember these promises in our current fears and realities.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us **new birth into a living hope through the resurrection** of Jesus Christ from the dead, that is, into an inheritance **imperishable, undefiled, and unfading**. It is reserved in heaven **for you**, who by God’s power are protected through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. This brings you great joy, although **you may have to suffer for a short time in various trials**. Such trials show the proven character of your faith, which is much more valuable than gold – gold that is tested by fire, even though it is passing away – and will bring praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. **You have not seen him, but you love him. You do not see him now but you believe in him**, and so you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, because **you are attaining the goal of your faith – the salvation of your souls.**” 1 Peter 1:3-9 NET¹

Many of you know that Michael and I like to go hiking. We were on a steep uphill climb, with very little break. Lots of rocks, and things to trip us up and it was muddy. At times my boots felt like I could barely get them free. Other times, we were slipping everywhere. Somewhere between setting out and reaching our destination, this was where we were. My feet were hurting, my knees were straining, there was no option but to continue. I saw a tree just above me with a branch hanging down. I grasped it to give myself a hand up so to speak as we continued our ascent. But that branch was not living, and my tugging on it just caused it to snap off, and I lost my balance. Down I went onto one of those nagging knees and a wrist.

When we hear that God’s promises through Christ’s resurrection will not perish, fade or diminish, it would be like having found a green sturdy branch to help me, not a faded, quite perishable reality. We all know that in our lives, even our lives do not last forever.

- God’s promise to us, our inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading

Let’s take a moment and think about those words that describe what we are given in light of our current time.

- How do you hear the words “Imperishable” “Undefiled” and “Unfading?”

¹ The translation of this passage above is from the New English Testament, or NET Bible which I use often because of its closeness to the original Greek in which this letter would have been written.

The people that the epistle of 1st Peter spoke to were living with death around them, in fear of death, or at the very least indignity in persecution. Today, the basis for our concerns may be different but many live fearing the worst. In addition to our fears about new illness, we live with other fears or concerns as well-

For some this may be mental well being, or perhaps the indignity of aging, we are concerned about whether food and other things we consume are safe. Will our jobs and sense of purpose survive? We worry about our data being breached, or hacked. Our lives can encounter real losses that 1st century folks could not even have envisioned.

What other things come to your mind?

Whether those fears come to pass , our feelings about possibilities are very real.

1st Peter assures that in the midst of what can perish or die, or be contaminated, or defiled or what seems to fade or ebb away, there is a beacon of hope. That although we face suffering or trials, our faith will protect us. We can draw upon it.

How does that sound to you? Can you think of a time when your faith protected you even in an overwhelming time? Maybe it was only when you looked back. 1st Peter expects that may be the case- “You do not see him now but you believe, you have not seen him but you love him.” Faith hopes for what cannot be seen.

On my hike that day, I prayed to God to get me through. My knee was still swollen, my wrist still hurt, my pack still felt heavy and I still had miles to go. I had to get out of the woods somehow. Remembering God’s promise to be my hope in all things became almost like a breath prayer.

There was one other thing that helped. I was not hiking alone. And 1st Peter reminds its readers/listeners, the words are not speaking not only individually but collectively- we will talk more about this later, but it is in walking together that we take turns listening, reassuring, reminding and supporting each other through all the challenges of living, knowing that no matter how bad it seems, or what mistakes we make, we cannot undo God’s promises for us. Today and every day.

Closing Prayer- Lord we thank you for the living hope you give to us in the risen Christ. Nothing can undo the power of resurrection, or your love and grace for us. Strengthen us in adversity that we may believe even when what we see looks bleak. You are our salvation and our protection and our source of faith. In you we trust through Christ our Lord. Amen.

NOTES: