



In the name of our risen Lord and Savior, dear friends in Christ: St. Peter was one of the very first eyewitnesses to our Lord's resurrection. In last week's Epistle lesson we heard him extolling the joy of the living hope that Jesus' resurrection gives to us who trust in him: the absolute certainty that because Christ died for sin and rose again that we to shall rise from our graves and live forever with him. Today's Epistle follows that from that idea as Peter explores the ramifications of how we Christians are to carry on here below in the present as we hold to this living hope.

We'll get to that shortly, but first I'd like to comment on the handful of fascinating verses that appear between last week's reading and this week's that the lectionary committee (in their infinite wisdom) chose to omit. In these verses Peter writes about the prophets of old and how they eagerly searched older Scriptures and even their own inspired writings to discover when the Christ would appear and how he would make himself known. You see, they knew that the Scriptures were pretty much all about the Christ, but they couldn't put all of the pieces together to form a coherent picture. They were sort of like the fabled five blind men in India who each tried to describe an elephant. You know the story: one grabbed the trunk and proclaimed that an elephant is like a snake. Another felt the side and declared an elephant is like a wall. One took hold of the tail and said an elephant is like a rope. The fourth felt the ear and said an elephant is like a fan. And the fifth touched the tusk and said an elephant is like a spear. They were all partially right, but they were totally wrong.

So it was with the Old Testament prophets and Bible scholars. There are passages that say the Christ will be a king. Others that say he will be a priest. Still others say he will be a prophet, a judge, a Savior, and so on. Some speak of his majesty and glory. Others speak of his humility and suffering. The toughest thing to chew on was that some passages describe him as divine: he's God. But others say that he's a man. How did it all fit together? No one could figure it out. They had all the pieces of the puzzle, but they couldn't even image how the final portrait would appear.

This explains in part why, as the whole picture was actually coming together during the life and ministry of Jesus, very few caught on to what was happening. In Jesus the Christ *had* come. He was showing himself to the world and fulfilling all the prophecies right before the eyes of very people who had the Scriptures and so knew what to expect of him. By his words and deeds he proved that he was the Christ. But the people who best knew the Scriptures, the priests, the scribes, the teachers of the Law, they didn't recognize him. They rejected him outright. The amazing thing is that even the men closest to him, his own disciples who *did* believe him to be the Christ, didn't really get it.

We see this in today's Gospel as Jesus walks along the road with the two Emmaus disciples. When he asks them why they're so depressed and to explain what happened, they tell him the whole story. They have it all right: Jesus' ministry, his miracles, his teaching, his arrest and crucifixion ... they even have the account of his resurrection, which they don't believe; *but it's all there*. They just can't put it together. So Jesus does it for them. "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

Jesus is the big reveal. In him all the ancient prophecies come together and are fulfilled. Jesus, his ancestry and birth, his life and ministry, his passion, death for sin, and resurrection - that's the theme of the entire Scripture and the salvation that was waiting to be revealed to us, the people of God living in the New Testament era who have the whole story and the aid of the indwelling Holy Spirit to understand it. What the prophets and even angels longed to understand in former times, that's been revealed to us, the people living in what the Scriptures call "these last days". And Peter makes an interesting comment about the prophets who went before. He says that even though they didn't get it all, it was revealed to them that in penning and preserving the sacred writings they weren't serving themselves, but rather us.

In the history of God's unfolding plan of salvation, this puts us in a very privileged position. We've got the whole enchilada: all the types, shadows, and prophecies of the past, and their complete fulfillment in Jesus. We see how it all fits together, the whole elaborate plan that was thousands of years in coming together and completing. We know all that the Lord has done for us in Christ Jesus. And we know the end of story: eternal life in glory with the Lord. In Christ Jesus, we have been made children of the heavenly Father and coheirs with Christ in his kingdom.

In view of this, Peter says, because being in Christ we do call God Father, and we know that as our Father he judges each one of us impartially, we are to conduct ourselves as children who justly fear their loving Father's disapproval and strive instead to please him. We've been redeemed from sin and worthless ways by the precious blood of Christ; how could we even think of turning back to them? To do so would be like the Israelites whom the Lord rescued and led out of Egypt, but then who, every time they came under trial, rebelled against the Lord and complained that life was so much better as a slave under the taskmaster's rod. That's insane.

Peter continues (at least, as we heard), "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love ..." – but unfortunately that's a bad translation. It turns out that the word "your" before obedience does not appear in the Greek text. Adding it, as the translators did, makes it sound like *your* obedience purifies you. That's not the Gospel. Your obedience does not purify you. That would be works righteousness, which the Scriptures flatly condemn. If you could purify yourself, you wouldn't need Jesus as your Savior. No, what the text actually says is "Your souls *having been* purified by the obedience of the truth for a sincere brotherly love ..." It's Christ's obedience that purifies you. It's God's gift of faith in the Gospel by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that makes you clean from sin and empowers you to actually show forth sincere brotherly love. Therefore, says Peter, because you *can* love, *do it*: love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

That's the goal of the Gospel: not just that we're saved from sin, but that we are restored to the state in which we can love one another as humans were originally created to do, as Adam and Eve did before the fall. That's what it meant for them to be made in God's image because

God is love. This image is even now being restored in us who have been born again, “not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God”.

Peter impresses upon us this idea: our first birth was a natural one, of the flesh. And because our parents inherited sin from their parents all the way back to the fall, we were born fallen, sinful creatures too, and therefore subject to death – that’s the wages of sin. Ah, but our second birth was supernatural. It was God’s work on us. We were born again of water and the Word, which is the imperishable Seed, the living and ever-abiding Word of God. And as we continue to hear the Word of the Lord, both the Law and the Gospel of our salvation, the Holy Spirit continues his work of putting to death the flesh and breathing life into the reborn child of God, which both strengthens our faith and produces the fruit of love.

In closing, Peter quotes from the prophet Isaiah: “All flesh is grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord endures forever.” That last line, “the Word of the Lord endures forever”, was chosen to be the motto for the *Book of Concord*, which is the compilation of our Lutheran confessions. It is, in a sense, our walk with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, our explanation and unfolding of the Scriptures that reveals Jesus Christ crucified for our sin and raised to glory as the sum and substance of all the sacred writings. Our flesh will one day fail. The old, natural person destroyed, returned to the dust from which it was taken. But the child of God reborn and sustained through this life by the Word will rise and live forever precisely because of its source: The Word of the Lord that endures forever. In this hope we live now in time, and in this hope we will be raised through our Lord Jesus Christ. In his holy name. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!