

Gracious God, open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom, and open our hearts and minds that we might know the cries of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and hurting, and sometimes even dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Today is the 3rd Sunday of Easter. Did you happen to notice the shift? It was a subtle shift of prepositions. In Lent we found ourselves in the third Sunday *in* Lent. Now we find ourselves in the 3rd Sunday *of* Easter. It is a sublet shift, but the subtlety is not lost as we look at the significance. Lent is a season of penitence, of preparation. It is a season where we are heading to the cross with Jesus. The Sundays *in* Lent are all little Easters as we prepare for the celebration of resurrection. In the great 50 days of Easter, we have already experienced resurrection and now we are celebrating that move on toward perfection that is part of the empowerment that comes from Jesus' resurrection and the new life that that event brings to those of us who follow him.

In the resurrection moment, what we have conceived to be normal is tossed to the wayside and a new normal comes to the fore. In some ways, the changes that are coming about because of the COVID-19 virus are challenging what we have come to accept as normal and in the process, we find that our lives are turned upside down. And rather than *fear* the change and *dread* the change, perhaps we are being challenged to *accept* the change and see where it leads us.

In some ways, those of us in the church have fallen prey to an idea that isolates us from our communities. We become comfortable in the traditions and the order that we find in our liturgies and our preferred order of service and we become inwardly focused. However, the church as Jesus envisions it is not

inwardly focused. It is outwardly focused with a charge to share the Good News with everyone that we meet. We are called to “go therefore into all the world” and not hide behind the doors of our sanctuaries.

I know that as we proceed through this season of separation that is brought to us by our response to COVID-19, that we find ourselves isolated. Separated from one another and separated from the bond that we share in the life giving and hope giving relationships that come as we worship together. We want to get back to normal, to the same old, same old. But as I feel it will be in the post COVID-19 world, it is in the post Easter world... there is no same old anymore. Everything is new. In the midst of the separation that we are experiencing, we might be living in a Good Friday kind of world, but we are of Easter. We are an Easter People. We *are* a people whose faith gives in to hope.

In this letter, Peter is challenging us to move to another level and another understanding of God. “If you invoke the Father, the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile” (1:17). There are a lot of different ways we can approach this verse. On one level, it is simply saying “Don’t go around calling God your Father if you aren’t going to live as though God was your judge.” Take it seriously, in other words. Let it mean something, this relationship with the Almighty; something transforming; something encouraging; something that calls you up short when you venture too close to the edge of temptation.

Reverent fear isn’t about terror or terrorizing. It is about being aware of the implications of your actions, your choices, your words, your life. It is a way of saying that your life matters. So, Peter says, set your life in something that survives, something that matters, something imperishable.

Peter says an amazing thing in that perishable/imperishable bit of his argument. He says that you were ransomed from **futility**, not with perishable

things like silver and gold, but with blood. At first glance, you might think he got the terms mixed up. What could be more imperishable than gold, for heaven's sake? Even when currencies rise and fall, gold continues to be a safe bet for assets. But Peter doesn't think so. His long-term planning has gotten really long-term. And even silver and gold won't sustain you; it won't last. What *will* last is blood – which means a relationship with the one willing to shed blood on your behalf, the one who shows you what really lasts.

Through him, the letter argues, we can be set in stone. Again, the irony is this argument about foundations comes in the letter that bears the name of the one called “Rock.” If anyone knows how difficult this is, it would be Peter. So, whether Peter wrote these letters or was the inspiration for them, there is a depth here that could only be lived experience.

“Through him you have come to trust in God” (1:21). Through him: Jesus came to introduce us to the God we thought we knew. And because Jesus said the Father and I are one, we began to realize, says Peter, that to trust in Jesus was to trust in God.

And then God did this amazing thing we call Easter. And now we know, that to put our trust in Jesus, is to set our faith and our hope deep in the rock that is God.

That's important: faith set in God; not in our own ability to respond **to** God or in our own steadfastness, but in the consistency of God. It is important because without that understanding, the next imperative is impossible.

This setting of faith and hope in God manifests in our lives as love. This relationship, this being embedded in the foundation of God, purifies your soul so that you can love. Pay attention to how Peter describes the process. This isn't love that you generate so that you can be a part of the foundation of God. We don't love our way into relationship with God. If that were the case, none of us

would ever get there. And none of us could love like we're called to love. It is beyond our abilities. But because of the relationship that Jesus handed to us through his suffering, we can be purified enough to love. It is a response to, a result of the relationship with God, setting our faith and hope in God, that enables us to love. It is the outgrowth of that relationship.

That's what being "of Easter" means. We are made new in the Resurrection and enabled to love like never before. "You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God" (1:23).

Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father, and to the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.