

Christ Reformation Church

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Living as Exiles in a Hostile World – The Epistle of 1 Peter

(Part 11 – The Living Word of God)

September 18, 2016

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 1:22-25

Scripture Reading: Matt 13:18-30

Seeds are remarkable things. Pick up say, a single bean from a bag you buy at the grocery store. One of the ways this bean is remarkable is that it is the fruit of a harvest, filled with food value. That is what grains are, for instance – wheat, barley, oats, rice, corn and so on. Food for people, food for animals.

Seeds are also amazing because of their ability to multiply. Plant one kernel of corn and get hundreds more from just one cornstalk.

But I suppose the most remarkable thing about a seed is that this dried up, hard, dead thing has the ability in itself to resurrect and come to life. Even seeds that have been found in Egyptian tombs, laying there dormant for millennia, have been planted and they grew! How can this be?

Put a seed in the right environment, specifically where there is moisture, and it swells and a plant starts to grow. Actually that plant was there all along in embryonic form lying right at the base of either one or two self-contained food storage pods called cotyledons. The cotyledons are the food we eat. Corn has one. Beans have two. If you have studied botany you know that botanists classify plants into two great groups based on this characteristic.

Seeds come to life, and the Bible very frequently uses this fact to illustrate spiritual truths, such as the resurrection of our bodies:

1Co 15:36-38 You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. (37) And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. (38) But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

In our text this morning, Peter refers to a seed. An imperishable seed – a seed in other words that is able to give life that will never, ever perish. Eternal life. Our new life in Christ. That seed is the Word of God. The gospel. *And if you are a Christian, that seed has burst open inside your heart and made you a new creation.*

1Pe 1:17-25 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, (18) knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

(20) He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you (21) who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (22)

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, (23) since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; (24) for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, (25) but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

As we have already heard in the Scripture reading this morning, the Word of God, the Gospel, is like a seed that is sown and where it finds receptive soil (faith) it comes to life – or rather, it gives life. Here are the words to the hymn we are going to sing at the close of today's service, a hymn based on this very image of the Word of God as a seed:

Almighty God, thy Word is cast
Like seed into the ground;
Now let the dew of heav'n
descend,
And righteous fruits abound.

Let not the foe of Christ and man
This holy seed remove,
But give it root in ev'ry heart
To bring forth fruits of love.

Let not the world's deceitful cares

The rising plant destroy,
But let it yield a hundredfold
The fruits of peace and joy.

Oft as the precious seed is sown,
Thy quick'ning grace bestow,
That all those souls the truth
receive
Its saving pow'r may know.

It is to the work of this divine seed in us that Peter says is a grand motive for us *to love one another earnestly from a pure heart*. The foundation this new life is built upon and made possible by the *precious blood of Christ* the Lamb of God given for us.

22) Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,
(23) **since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;**

Peter will go on to specifically describe this brotherly love he is speaking of that is the nature of who we now are in Christ. Here is an example:

1Pe 2:1-2 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. (2) Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—

Here are the qualities of a true church where Christ's true people are found:

- Obedient faith in the truth of the gospel
- A sincere “from a pure heart” brotherly love
- A putting away of the old person we used to be
- A thirst for God's Word
- Real spiritual growth as a result of drinking in that Word

Once again Peter is telling us – *this is who you now are in Christ, so live as the new creation. Be yourself!* God is holy, as we saw last time. You are His children and share in His nature. So you be holy too.

Sincere, Brotherly, Earnest, Pure Love

1Pe 2:9-12 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (10) Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (11) Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. (12) Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as

evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Love is a strange thing. I mean by this that of all the qualities we might imagine God would put forward as the essential mark of His kingdom, how many of us would have selected “love”? Obedience perhaps. Holiness. The fear of the Lord. But the thing that Scripture sets before us over and over and over again is...love. Holiness is necessary. The fear of the Lord is necessary. Faith is necessary. But the FRUIT of all these things is always going to be *love for God and love for one another, particularly love for God’s people – our “brethren” we can call them.*

Let’s think some more about this instruction/command Peter is giving us:

22) Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,
(23) **since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;**

Really, we have a working definition of love in these words:

- Sincere
- Brotherly

- Earnest
- Pure

Drive around the country and read church signs. Generally, I hate church signs because they are so syrupy and phoney. Not always, but most of the time. We ought to do a blog post on stupid church signs. Some of them are stupid because they are corny or have an unintended double meaning. But the worst ones in my opinion are the ones that make these announcements about how loving this church is and how warm and caring the people are, as if they are trying to convince one another that these things are true...when they know they are not.

Many, many professing Christian churches are characterized by the things that Peter says we are to put away from our lives:

- Malice
- Deceit
- Hypocrisy
- Envy
- Slander

...and so on. Simply posting a sign about love out front is not going to fool God and frankly it doesn’t fool many unsaved people either.

What I have found is that churches and people who keep talking about how much they love one another – don’t.

They are the kind of people Jesus will judge one day who try to brag to him about all the “loving” things they have done. But when it comes to the real article, this is what will do down:

Mat 25:34-37 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, (36) I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' (37) **Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?**

It is in the nature of the one who has been born of this living Seed of God's Word to love God and to love His people. It is in their hearts. Peter is telling us *so be who you are*.

Let's talk about these qualities of the love Peter is speaking of in more detail. Here they are once more:

- Sincere
- Brotherly
- Earnest
- Pure

Think this through. Sometimes the best way to understand a word is to think about what it's opposite means. So let's ask,

What is “insincere” love?

What is non-familial love?

What is un-earnest love?

What is impure love?

It isn't that difficult to answer these questions, is it? Phoney, hypocritical love is all talk. It is superficial “niceness” practiced only when it is convenient and doesn't cost anything. It is the smile behind which fangs lie. It is the kisses of an enemy. It is, once again, all talk.

Many years ago after sin began to be exposed in this church, a “pillar” of the church came up to me very angrily and said *“we have always had a reputation in this town as a loving, family church and now you've ruined all that! Now everyone is going to know about what is going on here!”*

Really. He said it. You can't make this stuff up. But this man thought he could fool God. And he thought that he could fool the unsaved people in the community that he had contact with each week. Guess what? He wasn't fooling anyone. His “love” as was so much of what characterized the church that then was, was in fact an “impure love.” Impure in motive. Selfishly

motivated for what he could get out of it. Eventually he moved off to find another “church” where he could practice his disguise unmolested.

Now, let’s move in for a more personal inventory:

How are you doing in this practical matter of holiness? Of being holy as God is holy? That is to say, how are you doing when it comes to being who you are in Christ? Look at these qualities:

- Sincere
- Brotherly
- Earnest
- Pure

Why are you here? There is only one correct answer – *because you love God and you love His people.*

In a small church like this – and there are many advantages to being a small church like this by the way – we pretty well know each others’ foibles. Glitches. Flaws and imperfections. Even some of our sins. You know mine and I know some of yours. I don’t care if you know mine and I don’t even care if you talk about mine sometimes because I know that you love me and have a benevolent rather than malevolent attitude toward me.

But the question to put to ourselves is, in spite of all these glitches we all see in one another, *do we love one another with a sincere, brotherly, earnest, and pure love?* That is the question, isn’t it?

Impure love. Think about that. Impurity can mean moral impurity but it also means “mixed, an alloy.” That is to say, an impure motive for “love” produces a fake love. So people talk and talk about how much of a Christian they are and how much they love, love, love and so on, but they tend to want to do so in a place and setting and circumstances where *it not only won’t cost them anything, it will in fact pay them dividends.* “Your church is too small. Your church doesn’t have the programs we need. Your church doesn’t....and on and on it goes. Make no mistake, in many communities *belonging to the “right” church can pay big bonuses, and belonging to the “wrong” church can be very costly.*

I suggest that we have been very much blessed in this church by the Lord in regard to how He has led us. It has often been an intense warfare, hasn’t it? We have wondered if this church would be destroyed? And yet here we are, sustained by the Lord as small as we are and given an effective, powerful ministry. And here YOU are.

Why are you still here? What do you get out of it, speaking in human terms?

Nothing.

This is the love of Christ in action, the pure, sincere love in His people. And it is His doing, for which He receives all praise and glory. Nothing here for us to boast about.

Finally –

(22) Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,
(23) **since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;** (24) for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, (25) but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

Here once more Peter quotes from the Old Testament, in this case from Isaiah 40.

Isa 40:6-8 A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. (7) The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely

the people are grass. (8) The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Who is this "voice" Isaiah heard? What is the Word of the Lord that stands forever – as Isaiah understood it and as it is applied now in the New Covenant?

It will be to those questions we plan to turn our attention next time.

In the meantime, remember who you are. Remember that his powerful, life-giving and even creative Seed – the Word of God – has come to life in you. Live as who you now are, not as who you once were.