**1 Peter 1:17-21** April 26, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Epiphany 3

*1 Peter 1:17Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. 18For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. 21Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Live As Strangers Here!**

How do you like camping?

“I love it!” some say. “Nothing I’d rather be doing!”

No, I don’t mean RV camping in one of those houses on wheels. I mean camping. Tents. Sleeping on the ground. No portable stove; cooking over a campfire. When we are younger, perhaps we enjoy that. It seems that most people get to age 35 or so suddenly find themselves too old for that stuff. Or maybe we just get smarter, or can finally afford an RV or hotels. But even if you should enjoy real camping at age 45 or 65, when you say that you enjoy camping, you probably mean, “On my vacation time, when the weather is nice, if every third or fourth night I can stay in a hotel.” Imagine waking up in a tent, and then having to clock in at 8am every day. Imagine raising a family in a tent. Imagine year-round camping, sun, rain or frost. Well, try this on for size: At age 75 someone promises you a place of your own, but for the short-term you will have to live in a tent; at age 100 you are still in a tent. This is the stuff of news documentaries. Headline: “Man promised home at 75, still in tent at 100!” Oh! The outrage!

Meet Abraham. Every Jew knows the story. Every Christian ought to know the story. Abraham lived in a tent all his long life. More than that, he kept moving around. Follow Abraham around in Genesis chapters 12-23 and he keeps on pitching and taking down his tent: Shechem to Bethel to Egypt to Hebron, etc. etc.

Some of you have been there. Maybe not a tent, but you have lived in half a dozen states and two or three countries. You know what it is like to see the sunrise over different horizons. When you know you will be moving to another address in 24 or 36 months, the question always on your mind is, “How much of this do I try to take in, and how much is just water off my back?” After the first two or three moves, it is mostly the latter. You get used to, what our reading calls, ***“living as a stranger.”***

The first verse of our reading takes that thought in a spiritual direction, ***“Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.”*** This “stranger” concept is a difficult one to translate. Other translations say “foreigner, sojourner, exile, temporary resident.” Even if it is difficult to put it into a single word, it’s pretty clear what Peter is saying here,

I remember spending parts of a couple summers with my aunt and uncle out in Iowa. They got me a job detassling seed corn. Good job. At age fourteen I could work three hard weeks in the summer and make enough money for a fourteen year-old’s entire year. But that’s not why I’m telling you this. Driving back to my aunt’s house one day we passed another field. People were walking the rows, and beat up vans were parked by the side of the road. She said they were migrant farm workers, people who came up from down South to work hard on American farms in the summer. In the fall they would return to family and friends and the place they called home. They never got confused about where home really was. They were up in Iowa for a while, but they didn’t learn to talk like Iowans, they didn’t root for the Hawkeyes. They knew where they were from, and where they were going back to, even while they worked far harder than I could out in the fields. That’s sort of what Peter is saying about us here in this world. While you live here, ***“live your lives as strangers in reverent fear.”***

**How to Live Like a Stranger Here**

How do you live like a stranger? He’s not telling us to be literal strangers, anti-social. The Apostle Peter is pretty clear in the rest of this letter that Christians *ought* to be conversant with the people of this world. He wrote this familiar passage, *“Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”* Jesus himself, the holiest man to ever walk the earth, made a habit of rubbing shoulders with the sinners and ne’er-do-wells as well the hypocritical half-believers. It’s pretty clear that when Peter tells us to be strangers in this world, it does not mean that holier-than-thou Christians wall ourselves off from sin-stained unbelievers.

Then what are we to be strangers to? ***“Live your lives as strangers… you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers.”*** We are not to be strangers to unbelievers, but strangers to the natural human way of life.

A man was telling me—and I don’t think he was bragging, but sometimes when you have a victory as a Christian you just have to tell someone. Anyway, a Christian man working for a payroll firm was telling me how he and a couple dozen co-workers were in a continuing education program with their work. They were divided into teams in a mock business exercise. For an hour or more the teams ran computer simulated businesses to see who would do the best job of it. When people on other teams would run into brick walls, this acquaintance (who was on one of the competing team) would give other teams pointers how to resolve their issues. I’m not sure what his team thought of him doing it, but at the end of the afternoon the facilitator of the class took him aside. She told him, “I have done this exercise with dozens of classes and hundreds, maybe thousands of people. You are the only person *ever* who has done that, who helped other teams succeed!” I’d like to think—no, I know—that his actions were because of his Christian faith. In his cut-throat business world, he was living like a stranger. He knew he had been redeemed from the empty way of life of this dog-eat-dog world.

Once we start down this road, the examples jump in front of us. Even as we joke with colleagues at the water cooler, we who have been redeemed from the empty ways of this world don’t talk like they do. We treat God’s name with respect, like they would their own Mamaw’s [Kentuckian for “grandma”]. We might go out with them for a drink, but not for half a dozen. While many of our classmates’ jokes make us laugh, there are some we don’t laugh at. We, you, have been redeemed from the empty way of life that the people of this world swim in. Living in the world’s ways angers our heavenly Father. It degrades ourselves. And it does not help others. Living lives full of greed and lust and partisan hatred are truly empty, bringing nothing good now, or in eternity.

**So, Why Not Live as Strangers? I’ll Tell You Why!**

To be totally honest, this life is pretty enjoyable. In our day *hard* work, I mean slave labor drudgery is rare, and poverty by the old definitions of poverty has almost vanished—at least in our nation. Compared to most of humanity for all of human history, we live very, very comfortably. Why would you want to be a stranger to that?

Another reason to not be a stranger to this world is that it has much to please us in nearly every way. Not only are our *needs* met, but in our day and age the world offers to meet all our *desires*. Who doesn’t want that? Who would take the genie in the lamp and toss him to the bottom of the deep blue sea without using a single wish? Why not move in together? He gets what he wants, she gets what she wants. Never mind that God wants none of it. Never mind that unwedded bliss is terrible for children. Never mind that it is, at the bottom of it, a completely me-centered decision.

Why live as strangers in this world when one of the most basic human needs is acceptance? When you live as a God-fearing stranger to this world, you lose most of that acceptance. How long can you bear the world’s scorn and frown? How many weeks can you sit at the lunch table by yourself?

Here’s another one: How many of our long-term goals are things of this world? Ouch! I have to seriously ask myself if I am as much a stranger to this world as I ought to be. How much time do I put in on our half acre over at 106 Joshua Court, and how much time on family devotions? Do I treasure my few weeks of vacation time more than my service-to-God time? I haven’t yet actually written out a bucket list, but I have a few items in my mind, and when it comes right down to it, what is the point of my mental bucket list? Don’t I think that heaven will be better than this world? Or do I have my doubts? (Just to be clear, I’m not saying a bucket list is wrong. But we ought to ask if ours betrays an excessive familiarity with this world.)

Plus, one more reason to not be strangers to this world is because it is just plain beautiful. God made such a beautiful creation, that even after the Fall, and even after God’s curse, it still is mostly beautiful. Have you sat on Gulf Coast beaches at sunset? Have you stepped away from the fire to look at the stars from a campsite? Have you visited our national parks? What about the people around you? Don’t you wish you had *more* time for them.

It is so easy for us to become entangled in this sinful world’s ways. And… it is so easy to take God’s blessings and to forget that they are blessings and to make them into gods!

**This Is Why We Live as Strangers Here**

That’s why the Apostle appeals to Christians so earnestly. He would sit us down and stare intently into our eyes, our vacant and glazed over in fascination with all that this world has to offer eyes, and he takes our hand and he slowly speaks to us, ***“You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ.”*** Remember Christ’s great love for you! Remember that he had to shed his blood as the price tag of your eternity, to buy you back from the Law’s demands on your life! Remember that not all your wealth, not even the world’s wealth, could do that. Remember Christ’s agony on the cross! Remember his victory at the grave! He did that all so that you don’t live in the despair of thinking that once this life is over, it’s all over. He did that so you can live in the faith and hope of life beyond this world. When you start thinking like that, then you have become a stranger to this world.

In 1910 two prominent men returned to the United States from Africa. One—vastly more prominent—was former president, Teddy Roosevelt, returning from his months’ long hunting trip in East Africa. Upon his arrival thousands crowded the wharf, the governor greeted him and bands played. At the same time, a then-prominent missionary whom time has forgotten—a certain Henry Morrison—returned from an evangelistic trip to Africa. There were no crowds, no bands, not even a relative to greet him. He boarded a train home and had no reception there either. The only person who recognized him was the old baggage master who only said, “Hello, there!” In a fit of self-pity, he could not help contrasting the homecoming of Roosevelt with his own. He thought, “God had privileged me to lead ten thousand souls to Christ… and yet there I was, without a soul to meet me!... Suddenly I stopped… I found myself saying aloud, ‘Maybe I’m not home yet!”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Neither he nor we are. Live like what you are: strangers here, whose home address is heaven. Amen.

1. (Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations* (§4365). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)