

**Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

**1 Peter 1:13-23 (Be holy)**

**Talk by Andrew Griffiths, Prayers by Margaret Davies**

Hi, my name is Andrew and thanks for downloading the talk for St John's Church. I will be reading from 1 Peter 1:13-23, giving a short talk and then Margaret will be leading our prayers, before we end.

The message of today's reading is that we should be holy – as we think about what that means for us, we should always recognise that the perfect example of living a holy life is Jesus Christ. So instead of focusing all our efforts on ourselves, we are called to focus on Christ. If there is no other message we can take away today, it is that – be imitators of Christ.

### **Reading - 1 Peter 1:13-23**

<sup>13</sup>Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. <sup>14</sup>As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. <sup>15</sup>But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; <sup>16</sup>for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'

<sup>17</sup>Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. <sup>18</sup>For 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 ancestors, <sup>19</sup>but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. <sup>20</sup>He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. <sup>21</sup>Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

<sup>22</sup>Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. <sup>23</sup>For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

### **Talk**

I think that there is quite a clear message in this passage – be holy! Peter started his letter with a reminder of the hope we have in Christ – this passage that follows is what we should do and be like in return. And there is a simple way to summarise it – as Peter himself says in verse 15: 'be holy in all you do.' That's it then, sermon done. That was easy.

Ah, no you don't get away with it that easily.

Because it's really easy for us to just say the buzzword and move on, but what does it really mean to be holy – what does Peter actually want us to do and what does holiness mean?

First, what is holiness? To be holy literally means to be set apart. 2 Timothy 20-21 explains it like this: <sup>20</sup>In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. <sup>21</sup>Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

To be holy is to be used for a special purpose – the purpose is to spread the message of Christ’s life, death and resurrection, the truest expression of God’s love for us. It is to recognise that we are different and have a clear and important mission.

But it also means we are to act differently, to act in line with the special purpose that we have. As we see in 2 Timothy and the articles of gold and silver, the ones set apart for a special purpose; if you let these tarnish and don’t take care of them, they will no longer be special. So, to be holy is to recognise that having a clear and important mission means that you have to act in a way that does not get in the way of that mission.

Holiness is more than just being set apart, it is being set apart to do good – as Ephesians 2:10 says. Holiness also comes specifically from God – God is the source of holiness. He is set apart from the world because He is the creator and the world is the created. His very nature is holiness – because He is set apart. All holiness comes from God and is an imitation of the holiness of God.

Our definition of holiness must also include this, then: it is therefore to be set apart to do good, as an imitation of God, the source of all holiness.

Peter describes us as ‘foreigners’ in verse 17 of his morning’s passage – we are, like God, no longer of this world, but of God’s Kingdom, revealed in Christ. That is what holiness means.

Second, why are we now holy, and what does it matter? Peter gives a very clear answer to this question – we are holy because Jesus has made us holy. And that has huge implications for us, because it was not a cheap and meaningless thing that Jesus gave to make us holy – it was His life.

A way to really understand this is to think, for a moment, about economics. In economics, there are two ways of valuing something – you can either look at what it cost to produce it, or you can look at what people would be willing to pay for it. Take, for example, designer clothes – they are, I hate to break it to you, made of the same material as your other clothes, but they cost more because people are willing to pay more for them. Their value is linked to the price that people are willing to pay for them, rather than the cost to produce it. You would call this subjective value. Or you can look at something like potatoes – they are, broadly speaking, as cheap as it takes to produce them. Their value is linked to the cost of production. You would call this objective value.

With Jesus and us, these two forms of value come together – Jesus’ sacrifice is the subjective value that God places on us, but this gives us an objective value. What I mean by this is, the price that Jesus paid on the cross is not linked to any intrinsic, or inbuilt, value that we have in ourselves, but on how much He was willing to pay to set us free. Jesus was willing to give everything to set us free because He loves us, not because of any goodness on our part. As Titus 3:4-5 say ‘But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.’ The value Jesus’ love and sacrifice places on us is far higher than we deserve, and it comes completely from God.

But this then gives us an objective value – and it is this that our passage from 1 Peter 1 emphasises. Verses 18-20:

<sup>18</sup> For 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 ancestors, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. <sup>20</sup> He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

Peter reminds us, we have been redeemed by the most precious thing ever – more valuable than mere silver or gold, money, diamonds or anything else this world uses. We have been set free by the sacrifice of Christ. And this gives us an objective value – we are worth now what it cost to produce us, and that cost was incalculable. And Peter, in our morning's passage, asks us to bear this in mind when we make choices in our life – we cannot act in ignorance of the price that has been paid for us and the worth this gives our lives. As Peter says in verse 21: our faith and hope are in God.

Thirdly, what does this practically mean? We are set apart to do good, in imitation of God. We have value beyond anything in this world, entirely because God has chosen to place this value on us, and not because of anything we do. Peter has a few points for us to follow: verse 13, we are to be 'alert and fully sober'; verse 14, we are not to 'conform to the evil desires we had when we lived in ignorance'; and verse 22, we are to 'obey the truth so that we have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart'.

It is this last one that I want to focus on. Because the joy of being set apart, is that we are set apart together. We are not alone, but are part of a new family, a new kingdom and a new people. We are set apart to live for one another, in love. This is love which is not to stop at the metaphorical doors of our church, but to reach out to the world in which we live. We are to love each other and the world – through social action like CAP, evangelism like Alpha and through caring for our planet by speaking out against those who would pollute and destroy it.

Alex has made the point to me a few times about the transition between primary and secondary school: at primary school you talk a lot about being kind, it is a highly valued thing, but then when you get to secondary school this is completely dropped – it becomes about attainment. What a huge shame – as we read in Titus 3, it is the 'kindness and love' of God that world is saved. Kindness is a defining characteristic of God, not something to get children to drop when they become 11.

When did the society and world we live in become so unkind and uncaring? When you look after number one and forget about the rest of the society. When we put up barriers to poorer countries by hoarding all the Covid vaccines for ourselves and don't even share how to make them with other – something thankfully that the US has recently said it will work to make right. When the government cuts overseas aid in the middle of a pandemic – cutting funding to water and sanitation by more than 80% and to refugees in Yemen by 50%. When did these things become ok?

In reality it always has been like this. But the Kingdom of God is not like this – it is a Kingdom where kindness and love define our action towards one another. Verse 23: For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. We are set apart, made special, by God's action, not because of anything we have done – but we are called to live lives based in the truth, so that we have 'sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart'.

Let's pray

Loving God, fill our hearts with the love that you freely give. Make love our first and last thoughts. May we love others and freely give to them. Make our spirit a spirit of joy, happiness, and love for both our friends and our enemies. Help us love as abundantly as you have loved us. Amen.

And now Margaret will continue with the prayers.

### **Prayers**

Let us start by confessing to God:-

Our Father, you made us to serve you, but we have turned our backs on you. We have done what we want, not what you want. We deserve your anger and your mercy is our only hope. Because of your love, forgive us and change us. In Jesus's name. Amen

In 1 John chapter 1 verse 8 we read, "because we confess our sins to God, he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all wrong doing, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

As a forgiven people, let us come to God with thanks and prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit through Jesus.

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we, who don't deserve those mercies, give you our humble and hearty thanks for all your goodness, blessings and loving kindness to us all. Thank you especially for the means to live and work. for security and health and above all for your saving grace through Jesus's sacrifice and hope of eternal life because of his resurrection.

Lord, in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

O Lord our Heavenly Father, we pray for the world you created that we humans have mismanaged. Please lead and guide the world's governments and authorities to halt the rate of climate change. Give them wisdom to work towards peace where there is war, racial unrest and terrorism. We pray especially against the spread of Coronavirus. May countries share vaccinations and equipment to help India, Brazil and other nations so that the medical staff and facilities can be efficient. We pray too for all those affected by disasters like the overpass rail collapse in Mexico and recent murders. Please comfort all the bereaved and heal the wounded and give the emergency services the skills, energy and equipment needed.

Lord, in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

Father God, we pray for Great Britain after all the elections on Thursday. Bless the Member of Parliament, the Mayors, the local councils, including our London one. May your will be done for our land through all these people to get us through the pandemic and good economic growth once more.

We pray too for our local community, that people will be safe and be responsible. We pray for our churches, that the plans for merging will go smoothly, that the right vicar will apply and be chosen who has a heart for the area, the church fellowships and above all a love of Jesus for us and Penge.

Thank you for our outreach activities. Bless each one:- The CAP centre with Rachel, Lin and Gareth; the food bank:- Amaze Penge with Cherry; The School, and this morning, happening now at Holy Trinity, Messy Church for families. Lord, may all these be able to spread your gospel and many believe and follow Jesus. Thank you Lord, for all the hard work put in by the leaders.

Lord, in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

Our Heavenly Father, there are many people in need connected with our fellowship. We pray for Will seriously ill in hospital. Bless his wife Kath and son Sam to cope with it. We pray for Andy in hospital, that his general health will improve so that he will be well enough to return home and he is wanting to join church again. Lord, bless those who are recovering, especially Val with walking, Sue, Julia, Zak, Lorraine and Karim's father. Pray now in a pause for anyone you know.....

Lord, bring healing and energy to them. Bring comfort to the bereaved, strength to the frail like Keith and Barbara and employment to the unemployed, especially Catherine who has been made redundant. May she find a part time job soon.

Lord, in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

Finally, we pray this prayer for ourselves written 500 years ago by Thomas a Kempis.

*Grant me, O Lord, to know what is worth knowing, to love what is worth loving, to praise what delights you most, to value what is precious in your sight, to hate what is offensive to you. Do not let me judge by what I see, nor pass sentence according to what I hear, but to judge rightly between things that differ, and above all to search out and to do what pleases you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Thank you for listening and God bless.