

## Fifth Sunday of Easter

### May 14, 2017

**1 Peter 1:17-21 (EHV)** – <sup>17</sup>If you call on the Father who judges impartially, according to the work of each person, conduct yourselves during the time of your pilgrimage in reverence, <sup>18</sup>because you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, not with things that pass away, such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup>but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot. <sup>20</sup>He was chosen before the foundation of the world but revealed in these last times for your sake. <sup>21</sup>Through him you are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

#### **Introduction & Theme: We're Strangers to This World.**

Sometimes the Bible uses a particular Greek word that speaks of this earthly life as if we're camping out in a tent. It's usually translated as "temporary residents" or "aliens" or "sojourners." Peter doesn't use that particular word here, but his point is the same. We're to live here on earth as if we're traveling somewhere away from home on a "pilgrimage" – as if this is just a temporary place of lodging, a mere waypoint on our way to our permanent destination. Let's follow that line of thinking this morning, as we study these few verses: **WE'RE STRANGERS TO THIS WORLD. We're strangers because we've been led to understand our redemption. We're strangers because we've been called to live in reverent fear.**

#### **Part I: ...because we've been led to understand our redemption.**

The first thing I want to do is give a disclaimer. A couple concepts in our text – redemption and reverence (literally: reverential fear) – can apply to both believers and unbelievers. It only takes a second to figure out which group Peter is speaking to. In the opening verses of the chapter, he'd talked about God giving "**new birth**" to the recipients of his letter. The word "**faith**" is mentioned several times. So, Peter's addressing believers.

That's important when we discuss the first concept – redemption. What applies to believers applies equally to every single person who's ever lived. But those who live in unbelief turn away from, and therefore forfeit, all the blessings that come from Jesus' universal redemption. That's what makes us strangers to the world – not just because we've been redeemed, but because we've been led to understand and *trust in* our redemption, by God's grace.

With that in mind, listen again to Peter's beautiful gospel words: "**You know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, not with things that pass away, such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot. He was chosen before the foundation of the world but revealed in these last times for your sake.**"

For people who live paycheck to paycheck, how fast the money disappears! How many hands aren't reaching out to take from what we have! And not all of those hands are even attached to those who provide what we'd consider the basic necessities of life – food, clothing, shelter, transportation, healthcare, etc. Sometimes the hands that reach out are the ones we gladly put our resources into for a moment of fun. Some people invest in precious metals. They don't pass away quite as fast, but they're still "perishable" commodities. Somehow or another, they're eventually consumed.

Even if that wasn't the case, it wouldn't make any difference in God's ledger. Sometimes people talk about the low value of the American dollar. When it comes to our redemption, neither cash nor coin, gold nor silver – not even platinum – could even come close to paying the price to set us free from the empty way of life apart from God.

And empty is a good word to describe the former way of life, isn't it? For Peter's Gentile readers, what benefits came from trusting in a pantheon of error-prone gods or a slew of pagan philosophers? Nothing but emptiness! For the Jewish readers, what benefits came from following the religion of the Pharisees, which was a mere shell of outward piety but had no substance? Nothing worthwhile! For modern-day Americans, what benefits come from the never-ending pursuit of one's own personal happiness that so often even ensnares God's people? Strained marriages; neglected children; depression; anxiety; fear of not being accepted; physical and mental exhaustion – all empty! Worst of all, those empty ways of life lead to a place of eternal torment that's empty of all of the blessings of the only true God.

That's what we were redeemed from. Not with a perishable commodity, but a priceless one! Gold can't cancel the guilt of sin. The whole point of the Old Testament ceremonial law, with its countless sacrifices, was to show how sin brings guilt. Sin brings God's white-hot wrath and his righteous judgment. No – it's blood, not bullion that buys redemption of sin and

its accompanying guilt. And not just any blood – not even blood from the best of the flock – but only the blood of God’s spotless Lamb. Each drop of his holy blood is precious beyond compare. And unbelievable love led him to shed more than a few drops, though one would’ve been more than enough. In the sacrifice of Jesus, then, see your redemption – your release from the condemnation brought on by your sins; your release from the power of the devil; your release from the control of your corrupt nature; your release from the sting of death. For, **“through him you are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”**

## Transition

It’s only those who’ve been led to understand their redemption – we believers – who can make sense of Peter’s opening statement of today’s text. We can now live as strangers to this world because we’ve been called to live in reverent fear.

## Part II: ...because we’ve been called to live in reverent fear.

I said earlier that fear is another word that can be applied to both believers and unbelievers. I think we mostly understand the two different connotations: to be afraid of something or someone or to stand in reverential awe of something or someone. It’s that reverential type of fear that Luther had in mind when he explained the commandments: **“We should fear and love God...”**

Unfortunately, the first shade of meaning – the being afraid aspect – can also be applied to believers, because we still have an old sinful nature that needs to be crushed. It can’t be converted, ignored, or underestimated. It can only be terrified through the harsh thunder of God’s law and rebuked through sincere contrition.

But then the heart of faith – the new spiritual nature given to us by the working of the Holy Spirit through the gospel in Word and sacrament – springs to life. In all truth, it can’t help it. Without ignoring God’s holiness, it’s pushed along by God’s boundless love. In that reverential fear, it sees God’s good and pleasing will as something to emulate. Peter had just given an appeal: **“Be holy in all you do.”** Then he goes on to say: **“If you call on the Father who judges impartially, according to the work of each person, conduct yourselves during the time of your pilgrimage in reverence.”**

That’s the exact opposite of how the world sees it all. God’s undeserved love is foolishness. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is absurd. God either must lower his standards or our works must carry more weight than we give them credit for. Maybe God grades on a curve. He’s gotta like me more than a good percentage of the people out there, right?

But Peter says that God doesn’t play favorites. He’s not subjective, or partial, or biased in his judgments. He judges each man’s work impartially, objectively, on its own merits. And objectively speaking, all the works of unbelievers are sin. Objectively speaking, all the works of believers are righteous.

With that understanding, there’s no problem seeing ourselves as strangers to the world. God’s called us out of that mess. Or as Paul would say, **“We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”** We’re able to approach all those commandments in a new, “strange” way. We can see them as opportunities to show our thanks to God’s free gift of forgiveness and salvation by conforming ourselves to his **“good, pleasing and perfect will”** – also Paul’s words, by the way.

We can turn away from the world’s worship of self and fear, love, and trust in God above all things. We can avoid the improper language spoken by the world and use God’s name properly. We can tear the world’s agenda out of our daily planners and put worship and Bible study at the top of the list where it “strangely” belongs. No matter what our age, we can stop acting like unruly children and respect those whom God’s placed over us in positions of authority. We can – believe it or not – help others, and respect our marriage vows, and respect others’ property, and respect others’ reputations, and be content with what we have – all foreign concepts to those who live according to the ways of the world.

## Conclusion

Because we’re not people of the world! We’re the redeemed people of God, set apart as his own and set apart to live in newness of life. We’re temporary sojourners here. Heaven’s our real home – our eternal home. Once again, the resurrection of Jesus guarantees it. Amen.