

**Alien Living – 1 Peter 1:13-25 – Bishop Richard Condie**  
**April 26, 2020 – St David’s Cathedral**

As a young person I was not a great reader. My literary endeavours were mainly Peanuts cartoons. The life and happenings of Charlie Brown, his dog Snoopy, his failure at baseball and his acerbic and sharp-tongued sister Lucy. I always felt for Charlie Brown as he was often the butt of jokes and certainly an outsider.

Around the age of 15 or 16 my brother encouraged me to widen my literary tastes. I took the plunge and read my first serious novel. Somerset Maugham was the author and the book was “Of Human Bondage”. It tells the story of Philip Carey and his journey from the childhood death of his parents, through his life and loves, as he lived with a disability, a club foot. It was an agonising read, not just due to my poor literary prowess, but because of the pain of isolation in this man’s life. He was a stranger to the world, an alien to his surroundings. Different to everyone else and out of step with those around him.

Living as a Christian in the world can be a lot like this. In fact, the apostle Peter describes the Christians he is writing to, in these terms in verse 1 of his first letter. He describes them as exiles, or strangers, or aliens in the world. He knows that following Christ, puts us at odds, with the world around us. Because we are called to a different kind of life.

Last week, Richard Humphrey, our Dean of Hobart here, began a new series in 1 Peter. A letter written to churches scattered through Asia Minor - modern Turkey. He was wanting them to grasp the magnitude of what God had done for them in Christ, and how he had reframed their lives.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...

If you missed last week’s sermon you can find it on the website.

In this second half of chapter 1 – he sets out what this alien lifestyle, this life of the exile in the world looks like. And the section is framed around 4 commands that set the people God apart from the world, and mark us out as strangers, aliens and exiles in the world, as we wait for God: Hope in grace; Be holy; Live in fear; Love one another. Let’s look at each in turn: Please have your bible open to 1 Peter 1

**1 - Hope in Grace - v13.**

*<sup>13</sup> Therefore preparing your minds for action; disciplining yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed.*

The exiled Christian is first called to lift their gaze to hope beyond this world. She doesn’t hope in the world’s hope, or temporal hope, or fleeting hope. But in the hope of future grace. The grace that Jesus Christ will bring when he is revealed; when he comes again. The hope we have, is that when Jesus is revealed on that last day, he will treat us not as we deserve but with his amazing grace, His unmerited favour. The grace that Peter had talked about earlier in the chapter – new birth into a living hope.

On Easter Monday the owner of MONA, David Walsh, was published in the Mercury about the light beam that shines into the night sky from his famous art gallery in Berriedale. He told us that the light was going to shine every night, to give us hope.

He even claimed “Easter” as the source of hope, of life beyond death. But it was a hope that removed God from the picture. “God is out” he said, “with those consequent silly beliefs”. He wanted us to hope. But hope in what?

Some people’s hope is in the end of the lockdown. Some hope for a holiday in Fiji when this is over. Some people’s hope, is to see their family again and have a hug or a kiss. For some it is a nebulous beam of light in the air. But actually the only hope that will be secure is the hope that we have of being received by the grace of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

This is how different, alien, strange it is to be a believer in our modern world. And Peter knows it is not easy. In fact, the words translated “prepare your minds for action” to discipline ourselves to have this hope, are literally “Gird up the loins of your mind”. In the ancient world, if you had to do hard work, or run, then couldn’t do it in your long flowing robe, so you tucked in your belt. Girded up your loins.

Today he might have said, roll up the sleeves of your mind – here is hard work, to set your hope on future grace. This is why we read the bible every day. The world has brainwashed us in thinking that hope can be found food and drink, or relationships or holidays or fast cars or nice houses – retail therapy. But actually hope is found when we retrain our minds through hearing God’s words every day, that true hope is found in future grace.

So that is number one – Set your hope in Grace.

## **2 - Be holy. v 15**

*as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct;*

“Holiness” of course, is an attribute of God. And Peter says that, in the next verse quoting from Leviticus 11:44. God says: “You shall be holy for I am holy.”

Holiness is not to be equated with being out of touch, withdrawing from the world, wearing brown robes, and shuffling along in silence like a monk in a medieval monastery. No – Peter’s vision is that holiness is in “All our conduct”; – in everything we do; in our work and play, and study, and family life. In isolation and community; wherever we find ourselves.

The holiness of God refers to his separateness. His distinctiveness from the world around him. The text says: “not being conformed to our ignorant desires”.

See the world says – “don’t be different. Blend in. Do what everyone else is doing”. A journalist was in my office a few years ago, and she was asking me about the Christian view on marriage. She was incredulous when she exclaimed: “But aren’t your views out of step with community expectation?” as if this was the greatest scandal. My reply was, “Of course they are – the man I follow got crucified for being out of step with community expectation!”

That is the essence of holiness. To live the whole of life like God would have us live: separate, distinctive, like God himself; cherishing the things he cherishes; living his integrity, consistent with his self-revelation.

In Leviticus – holiness is about: right relationships with God and others; attitudes of love; giving honour and respect to creation, people and places; not treating God lightly; not treating neighbours lightly. It is about private morality, AND public goodness. This is the distinctive holy life of the alien Christian.

What you do about creation care and the environment, what you do for your neighbour in need, what you do about self-isolation, what you do in your bedroom – matters to God. As Peter says: “like obedient children do not be conformed to the desires you had in ignorance.”

That’s number 2 – Be holy!

### **3 - Live in Fear. v 17**

*If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile.*

The word “reverent” I not in the original. It simply says – “live in fear”.

Now this could have two meanings – the first is live in terror of God. But that doesn’t quite sit with the joy and confidence that the believer is supposed to have when they have a relationship with God. In the next verse Peter says we have been ransomed with the precious blood of Christ. No need for terror there.

The second way is the way our translator wants us to read it – that is “fear” as in “reverence”. Fear like you might have before you appear before a judge. Or that churning in the tummy when the police pull you over. But the danger is we will lose something of the power of the words if we simply call it “reverence”.

One of my hobbies is to work with wood. I have power saws, a lathe, sharp chisels and planes in my workshop. They could severely harm me if I use them incorrectly. I am a little bit afraid of my circular saw. And rightly so! I treat it with the utmost respect because I am fearful of its power. It doesn’t mean I don’t use it, but I come with deep respect.

The God we worship is full of grace and mercy. He can be approached confidently. But at the same time, He is never to be approached lightly or with too much familiarity. He is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12), the one who judges our deeds. He is the one who rules in heaven and holds the world to account.

A famous line in the CS Lewis’ “The lion, the witch and wardrobe” is when the children meet Aslan for the first time. Here’s the quote:

“Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"... "Safe?" said Mr Beaver ... "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you.”

The Lord Jesus who will judge the world on behalf of the Father is not safe, but he is good and we live in reverent fear.

The world will scoff at this. “What nonsense” they say. “No one is going to judge you. You can live how you like. Make your own choices. Choose your own path.” But as exiles and strangers and aliens in the world, we live in reverent fear.

#### **4 - Love one another v 22**

Read it with me: Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.

This is the most distinctive characteristic of the alien people of God living in the world. Love for one another, deeply from the heart. Radical love that is costly, obedient and in response to God’s grace.

The world has pockets of love, but human beings are largely selfish and interested in their own personal gain. Followers of Christ are alien strangers in that we live not for ourselves but for others. We should be the first to take the costly decisions to protect the health of those around us. We should be the first to care. We should be the first to reach out in love to the vulnerable and the lonely, as we love deeply from the heart.

This week I have distributed some guidelines to our Parishes on responding to Domestic and Family Violence. We know it is on the increase during the COVID isolation. Our churches are to be places of safety and love. And we stand to love one another.

So here Peter paints the “alien lifestyle” of the believer. Four distinctive characteristics of those who are living alien lives as followers of Christ in our world: Hope in grace, Be holy, Live in fear, Love one another.

But just before I finish, one last observation. All of this distinctive living is not in first place, but in response to something else. The very first word of the reading today is: “Therefore”. What we have been talking about is based in what has come before. Our distinctive lives are a response to the grace, and initiative, and love, and hope, that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ; in response to what HE has done for us.

The good news – that by his great mercy we have been born anew into a living hope through the resurrection from the dead. Yes, it is an alien life! Because it is our life in the light of the resurrection from the dead and the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

May your word live in us, and bear much fruit to your glory.