

The modern liturgical revisers were spot on by replacing the OT with the book of the Acts of Apostles in order to emphasize the life of the Easter Community. They chose 1<sup>st</sup> Peter as the Epistle reading at the Easter season for the church to carry out the indispensable act of devotion to the teaching of the Apostles. They chose this letter which bears the name of Jesus' leading Apostle. However, one minor defect. In between last Sunday and this Sunday it leaves out chapter 1 vs.13-16 as well as vs 22-25. This is one of my criticisms of modern liturgy. It seems to be above the authority of the Holy Scripture and therefore excises whatever parts it dislikes. Or disproves.

Bishop Stephen Neill, who was one of my theology teachers, in his writing on 1 Peter concludes with the following words: *A perusal of this little tract, which could so easily have disappeared, leaves on the mind of the reader an astonishing impression of completeness. If all the rest of the new Testament had been lost and we had only this single specimen of early Christian writing, would we lack anything that is essential to Christian belief and to the life of godliness? It is true that the writer does not sound the same depths as Paul or reach the same heights as John; but he does place before us fair and square the picture of one who suffered, 'the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God' (3.18), and lays upon us uncompromisingly the obligation of total surrender and commitment to him.*

This is an excellent guide to our study of 1 Peter. As we read chapter one in last and this Sunday we are very much aware of all the important words of Christian faith appearing. If you have time this afternoon, try to highlight or underline all the big words of Christian belief in chapter one, I can assure you, at least a dozen words will be found without difficulty.

In today's passage, and I would add vs 13-16 as well vs 22-25, let us consider how the author wants us to know Christian belief and life of godliness come hand in hand. I don't need to say much about Christian faith which looks both backwards and forwards, that is to say, to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also to his coming again in which our salvation will be fully revealed, or as verse 13 describes it: *'the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed.'* Likewise, Christian ethics respects the natural structures of life in the world, while being conscious of the new Day has dawned, looking forward to the new world taking over the present one. In 1 Peter, for example, we have already seen the characterization of the Christian life in terms of hope, which is set *'fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ' (1.13)*. But then surprisingly it elaborates Christian ethics in terms of respectful submission *'for the Lord's sake'* to every institution of human life, especially the institutions of government, labour and marriage (2.13ff.). You may wonder why. Well, a hope which envisages the transformation of existing natural structures cannot either attack or repudiate those structures. But is constantly aware of the fact that all these natural structures and institutions need redemption and how transitory is their present form. 1 Peter in other words does have a word to say to our present discussion on global warming and climate change.

The author used a model known to his readers to describe the community of faith with respect to the world. Up to this point the Jews had characterized themselves as Diaspora living as they were outside their homeland of Palestine. The Christians lived among their neighbours in a way comparable to the Jewish Diaspora. These Christians understood themselves as the new people of God living throughout the

entire known world; they were like the OT people of God, living in Exile. Hence from the time of 1 Peter to the close of the first three centuries Christian referred themselves as Diaspora.

The author also used a second model to describe Christians being strangers among their fellow-citizens. This model looks back to a new beginning that could only be compared to a new creation and bore the significance of the Exodus. In 1.3 it said, *'Praise be to the God...who in his great mercy gave us new birth into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!'* But this model also reminds the early Christians they must look at how they should live now. 1 Pet.1.13 said, *'therefore, gird up your minds!'* In other words, they would live from now on as strangers (1.1; 1.17) and thus until the consummation in suffering (1.6). They couldn't live otherwise since they were 'elect' (1.6), 'saints' (1.16), 'God's people' (2.9). In short, the apostle Peter understood and designated the early Christians as a group of people who were transferred to an entirely new existence and in this way were estranged from society precisely as a community sojourning in a transient world.

Now how should the community of faith, that is, the church live in the new existence while being estranged from society? Now let me propose to you a simple understanding of Christian ethics in terms of the traditional terminology. That is to say ethics begins with indicative and ends at an imperative. In 1 Peter 1.3 we are told *'Christ gave us new birth into a living hope'* which is a descriptive statement. This descriptive statement of hope is immediately followed by the imperative in 1.13, *"set your hope fully!"*. In terms of belief we Christians live by faith, but in terms of ethics we live by hope.

The community of faith, conscious of being estranged from society must always be reminding itself how it came into being. Chapter 1 of 1 Peter tells us everything sprung forth from the gospel of the redemption that happened in secret through the cross and resurrection and would come forth in full view in the coming future.

Why is it happened in secret? Aren't we told to be living as witness? This is to do with the last sentence of chapter one: *'That word is the good news that was announced to you.'* What is that word? It is the transforming power of the gospel. The gospel must be spoken and it speaks direct to the heart and mind of each hearer. Whoever obeys the gospel, including the commandments of the Sermon on the Mount and the call to discipleship would become estranged from the everyday life of society. They begin to live a new human existence.

This morning, in the service, we hear God's word and summon us to have faith, and new life. If you have not experienced it before, may I encourage you to seriously embrace the gospel and accept this new human existence by faith? To those who have already possessed new life, may I encourage you to think seriously whether you live by faith as well as by hope so that you are conscious of the fact that you are sojourners on earth and that you eagerly look forward to the revelation of Jesus Christ.