

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday after Trinity, June 17, 2012

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 236, 473:1-2, 19:1-4, 411, 234.

Lessons: Genesis 12:1-9, Hebrews 11:9-16, Matthew 24:21-24.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 1:1-2.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Simon Peter is a man who was a professional fisherman whom God called to be a fisher of men, like other plain, simple men whom God turned around in their lives and called to follow him. He was one who was brash, bold, and outspoken, except on one occasion recorded in Scripture after Jesus had warned Peter that he would deny him. Because of that sin, that denial, he can write with conviction, telling us: 'I've been there, done that. I've denied my Savior. But God's grace is sufficient – not only for me, but for all mankind.'

Peter is the name given to Simon, son of John, or Jonah, by Jesus himself. The word is related to a Greek word for "stone" or "rock".

He wasn't so rock-firm when he denied Jesus. But by the grace of God, he is strong and gives strength when

PETER WRITES *"TO GOD'S ELECT, STRANGERS IN THE WORLD, SCATTERED"*

- 1. Believers *"have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,"***
- 2. *"Through the sanctifying work of the Spirit,"***
- 3. *"For obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood."***

Peter identifies himself, the writer, as ***"an apostle of Jesus Christ."*** An apostle is one who is sent out. He was first called, with his brother Andrew, with these words: ***"'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.'"*** (Matthew 4:19) After Peter's three-fold denial of Jesus at Jesus' trial, after his bitter repentance, and after his reinstatement after the resurrection of Jesus, he was sent out by Jesus Christ to feed his sheep and lambs.

Peter is writing because Christians in Asia Minor had come under terrible persecution. They were being tempted and pressured to give up their faith. The evil one, Satan, about whom Peter later in this letter gives strong warnings, was trying to make their lives miserable because of their relationship with Christ. Peter wanted them to see that persecution and pain are not signs of failure, but are to be expected on the road to triumph with Christ. With the help of the Holy Spirit, they can be overcome and turned into opportunities for growth and blessing.

Peter uses three unusual terms for them: ***"God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered."***

He writes to and for God's elect, God's chosen ones. They are those who believe, who were chosen by God's boundless grace to believe. Jesus died for all men. But many reject that salvation earned for them. The doctrine of election, also called predestination, is given for our comfort. Paul in Romans 8:28-31 speaks of election in this way, introducing the idea for our comfort: ***"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?"***

Peter tells us that God's elect are strangers, aliens, foreigners in this world. They are not natives. They never expect to become natives. Because they are God's believing children, they do not want to be considered

or treated as natives by the people among whom they happen to be living. In fact, they know that they may even be expelled as the Roman emperor once expelled Jews from Rome. Aliens are often held in contempt by the natives among whom they live. To this day they may be placed under severe restriction in times of war or civil strife. They may be interned, imprisoned, or even expatriated.

Yet Paul calls his readers elect foreigners. Peter exalts his readers far above those among whom they live. They are God's chosen people while the people among whom they are scattered are nothing of the kind. In fact, God's election has made the Christians "foreigners" to the rest.

This election is solely because of God's grace. They are in the world, but not of the world. They are definitely strangers in the world. Their homeland is in heaven. And in many cases they are also strangers to one another. That may happen because they don't openly confess and speak of their faith. Much of what passes for Christianity in our world today is merely empty words that say nothing about salvation from sin through faith in Jesus Christ. And many are deceived and taken in by such empty words, and praise the preachers who say such pious-sounding words, often spoken to make people feel good without giving them the genuine feel-good message that Jesus redeemed them from all their sins.

As believers in Christ, we can read these words today and realize that we have something in common – we are strangers in the world but members of the Holy Christian Church, the invisible gathering of all believers. In fact, you can read this book all alone and know you are not alone in God's sight. You are part of the glorious Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints.

Believers are scattered in this world. There are many reasons for this. When this book was written, one of the chief reasons was persecution in Palestine – Judah and the Old Testament land of Israel. Another would have been that their business dealings took them away from their ancestral homeland. And, of course, they are scattered so that they might bring the message of salvation to others through their words, their confession, and their examples of God-pleasing lives. Faith comes from hearing the Word of God, and sharing that Word of God is part of our mission when we are scattered in the world.

But even now they were being persecuted in the places in which they lived. One might ask even today – if Christians are not being persecuted, are they living as Christians – that is, "Christ-like"? For that is what the word "Christian" means. We don't go out of our way to be persecuted, but persecution finds those who seek to follow Christ and to let their lives be an example of God-pleasing behavior.

Peter later writes to encourage all believers: ***"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."*** (1 Peter 2:9-12)

Just as Abraham in our lessons looked forward to a heavenly home, so we look forward with confidence to a heavenly home. The older we get, the more troublesome this world seems, the more we realize with the hymn writer that "I'm but a stranger here, heaven is my home." That is just like all those believers named in the book of Hebrews who ***"admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."*** (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Believers are small oases in the desert, or like islands in the sea. They are part of small, scattered minorities surrounded by great, pagan majorities.

Isn't this much like us? People tend to think today that our nation is a Christian nation. But Christians – genuine Christians – are really still a small minority. This is evident from the great disregard for the truth of God's Word and from the toleration of all sorts of immorality and wickedness. This is evident from the disregard people have for any kinds of laws and from the emphasis on doing exactly what you want to do without regard for anyone else.

Yes, Christians today are still ***“strangers in the world, scattered.”*** When this description is applied to Christians, this scattering implies that heaven is their true home; that the earth and the world are to them as a foreign land which they would at any time gladly leave for their home above. Although they are scattered, they are still God’s chosen people, having been elected by God before the foundation of the world to be His own.

The picture in Ephesians 2:13 and verses 19-22 certainly applies: ***“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ... Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”***

Peter is writing to those chosen by God. Regardless of their status in the world – persecuted, ignored, mocked, a minority – they are chosen and selected and elected by God. They did not choose to be elected, but this is God’s foreknowledge and election. This was made ours through the work of sanctification by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit called us, sanctifying us through the Gospel. This work, in the majority of cases, was begun in Baptism, but is carried forward throughout the believer’s life, through the working of the Holy Spirit, who lives in all Christians through faith, who cleanses their hearts.

And the purpose of this predestination, the aim of God’s election, is that the elect should be brought, as Peter says, ***“for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.”*** God’s goal and purpose is that those whom he has chosen and brought to the obedience of Jesus Christ, that is, has brought to faith will continue to believe and follow Jesus Christ. This faith is worked in their hearts through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. For the reconciliation of man’s guilt, that is, the forgiveness of sins, has been assured through the shedding of the innocent blood of Christ. Our faith rests upon His vicarious work. In this way we are obedient to the Gospel and to Christ. Paul writes in Romans 10:16 ***“But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’”*** (NIV) Listen to that same passage in the King James Version: ***“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?”*** So we see that when Scripture speaks of “obeying the Gospel” it means “accepting the Gospel”. Paul writes of believers in 2 Corinthians 10:5: ***“We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”*** Scripture also states that Jesus Christ ***“became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him”*** (Hebrews 5:9)

Notice how strongly the apostle emphasizes at the very beginning of his letter that our salvation is, in every respect, from every side, a work of the Triune God, the three persons of the Godhead being coordinated in this act, as having worked simultaneously, with equal power, and with the same purpose.

Living in obedience and constantly being cleansed with Christ’s blood, we are what God intends us to be: total strangers to the world of men around us, wherever we may live.

These verses close with the words we introduce our sermons with: ***“grace and peace”***. Peter writes ***“Grace and peace be yours in abundance,”*** the same words he begins his second letter with!

We have been washed, “sprinkled” by the blood of Jesus, using a familiar picture from the Old Testament, and as a result we have God’s undeserved love, mercy, and peace multiplied unto us

This is completely in agreement with Jesus’ promise that he will not leave us comfortless. We can find the comfort from God every time we open our Bibles and read, every time we hear the Word of God. So not only did we begin our sermon with these words, but we close today with this benediction from God: ***“Grace and peace be yours in abundance.”*** Amen.