

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
 Sunday, April 23rd, 2023
 Rev. Gerry Gallant

Christians are Strange!
 Third Sunday of Easter
 1 Peter 1:17-23

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Sing praises to the Lord, you faithful;
We will give thanks to God's holy name.

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.
We will give thanks to God's holy name.

God has turned our mourning into dancing! Let us praise and not be silent!
Lord our God, we will give thanks to your holy name, now and always!

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

God of the Risen Christ and the rising earth,
 we come before you this day
 giving thanks for all the wonder in your creation:
 for the tiny perfection revealed in a baby's fingers grasping ours,
 in each daffodil unzipping its jacket to greet the spring,
 and each rock face worn by wind and water,
 bearing its rugged beauty with your praise.
 These details lift our hearts to praise you, too.
 So let the details of the story the Risen Christ lift our hearts this day,
 that we may greet a new week
 as an occasion to discover him in our midst,
 making all things new with the springtime of your Spirit.
 Receive our heartfelt worship, O God,
 Creator, Christ and Spirit,
 ever Three and ever One,
 now and evermore. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn #299: "Holy, Holy, Holy" (V 1,2,4)

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
 Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
 Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
 God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
 casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
 cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
 which wert and art and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
 All thy works shall praise thy name in earth, and sky and sea.
 Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
 God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!
 Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

**God of each and every life,
 week by week we lay our lives before you,
 acknowledging ways in which we fall short of your hope for us.
 Today we confess we sometimes find it hard to forgive ourselves.
 Things done long ago still haunt us.
 We hear your forgiveness proclaimed,
 yet your promise of a fresh start can ring hollow.
 Forgive us if we think we are the one sinner who cannot be forgiven.
 Forgive us when we cannot find the peace you offer.**

Assurance of Pardon

Friends in Christ, while it is true we have all fallen short of God's intentions,
 it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love in Jesus Christ.
 To all who humbly seek the mercy of God, Jesus offers forgiveness and new life.
 So be at peace with God, with yourself, and with one another.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
 Forever and ever. Amen.**

Music Ministry: "Give Thanks" Choir

Responsive Reading

116 I love the LORD, because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy.

**2 Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.**

**3 The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.**

**4 Then I called on the name of the LORD:
"O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!"**

5 Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
our God is merciful.

**6 The LORD preserves the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.**

**7 Return, O my soul, to your rest;
for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.**

8 For you have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling;

**9 I will walk before the LORD
in the land of the living.**

10 I believed, even when I spoke:
"I am greatly afflicted";

**11 I said in my alarm,
"All mankind are liars."**

12 What shall I render to the LORD
for all his benefits to me?

**13 I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,**

**14 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.**

15 Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.

**16 O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.**

You have loosed my bonds.

**17 I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the LORD.**

**18 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,**

**19 in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.**

Children's Hymn: "The B.I.B.L.E."

The Bible, Yes that's the book for me
I stand alone on the word of God
The Bible.

Children's Lesson

**Prayer for illumination
(Congregant Prepared)**

Scripture

1 Peter 1:17-23

17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

Sermon

You don't drink. Why not?

You cannot come out for golf on Sunday morning. Why not?

You pray to some imaginary sky God before you eat. Why?

Why do you spend so much time, energy and money helping others, do you know how much better your life would be if you did not do that?

Why do you believe in a book that was written by man?

You do know there is no God right, so why do you go to church?

This is just a small sampling of some of the things I have heard from friends, family members and colleagues at work as I have walked with Christ in my life. I am sure that many of you have heard similar things, and probably more, all of them questioning why Christians believe in God and why we do not just conform to society and give up our foolish ways of following God.

The truth is that Christians are strange, every Christians will hear someone say this to them. It may not be direct like it was when we were children, but it will be implied in the body language, the weird intonation, or the quizzical look on someone's face as we explain an aspect of our faith to them and why it counters what is widely accepted in society. In modern society it has even gone one step further, Christians are often no longer just strange they are now phobic.

In a culture that has constantly been changing norms, Christians are considered strange. This is not new; many people viewed the early Christians strange because they only worshipped one God and refused to make sacrifices to the other Gods of the culture. Many of the early Christians of the church were martyred for this reason because they worshiped only God and refused to worship at the alters of the pagan God that the people had all decided was the most important God at that moment.

Think about how quickly our society changes its false Idols, we have movements and fundraisers on all sides of the political and social spectrum rising up almost on a weekly basis and when we refuse to get caught up in them like our family, friends, and neighbors we are the ones who are considered strange or phobic and now in some cases we are persecuted for our beliefs and the time is coming when we may be prosecuted for them as well.

We live in a time and a culture where what is right and wrong is undergoing a constant flux, where people are arguing for nothing to be considered wrong any longer, we just need to accept people the way that they are. Our society is shifting so quickly that it no longer sees the danger of the slippery slope that it is sliding along and has become more and more transfixed on just chasing its own carnal and sinful nature.

What Peter is telling the people of God in today's Scripture is that we are strange, we are different. We are not called to be like the world with a constantly shifting moral and ethical standard. He is reminding all Christians that we are lives based in what we value, and our values form the basis of our lifestyle. If we fix our minds on the ever-shifting cultural values of the world, we will live a worldly centered life and we will be focused and dependent on the culture. We will begin to alter our faith to bring in the changes in culture that appeal to us and in doing so we will give up our faith and obedience to God.

Peter is saying this is not how Christians are to live. Christians have a fixed point of morality and ethics to be focused upon, one that allows us to move through the dangers of the ever-shifting cultural norms. It is stable, it is constant, it is the rock of our

salvation, our Lord Jesus Christ. While the world shifts around us and the moral and ethical values of society changes bringing in new cultural and societal norms, Christians will not change. Christians will remain focused on the one place from which we draw our values we will stand apart from the world as a people who are centered on our God and not on the thoughts and feelings of the culture around us. When we are centered on God, we are consistent in this ever-changing world.

The very first point that Peter makes is that we belong to the Father, and even though we are part of His family, and our sin is forgiven, it does not give us an excuse to sin. Instead, we should be more aware of the consequences of sin in our lives.

17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,

Peter is telling all Christians that God cares about your character, He cares about who you are! God will judge impartially, notice there is no question about 'if' God will judge. God will judge and when he does it will be impartially, there will be no favoritism. We are to call on God, to be in a relationship with him, to know that he is the Father, and we are His sons and daughters, and to know that this does not give us free license to live our lives the way we want.

We are to call God father and to honor and respect him and his Word as such.

Leviticus 19:1-3

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. 3 Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.

We are called to respect God with fear and reverence, more so than our earthly parents. We are called to reflect His nature in our lives, he is holy, and we are called to be holy as well. This is one of the most challenging aspects of our faith, and one that has been lost on much of modern churches, God cares about our character, he will judge us impartially based on his standard of holiness. The world wants a God that loves you just the way you are, and the Scripture disagrees with this statement over and over, God loves us that is true, which is why he calls for us to be His. The world wants a soft, fuzzy, loving God, one that never says no to a sinful pleasure we want to pursue, one that will never hold us accountable for our behavior.

Scripture says that God is the faithful creator, and he will be the one that holds all of creation accountable, all of creation, believers and non-believers will both be held accountable and impartially judged.

The book of proverbs teaches us this.

Proverbs 24:12

12 If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?

Jesus himself says this in the book of Matthew.

Matthew 16:27-28

27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. 28 Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

This coming judgement is a reality that the modern church has set aside to pursue cultural acceptance. However, this knowledge of who God is calling for us to be and His judgment was central to Christianity in the early church.

This causes many modern days church goers' problems. Many people view their faith as a kind of monopoly 'get out of jail free card.' Yet the Scripture says this is not so. Everyone who calls themselves Christian will be judged.

Peter 4:17-18

17 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

Our faith does not protect us from judgement, but it does ensure our eternal salvation.

1 Peter 1:18-23

18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

This is probably where many people become lost and confused in their understanding of salvation. The way we live here on earth has nothing to do with our salvation if we are

true believers. However, our actions do have consequences, they will be judged by God. God will be impartial, we will be judged, and the faithful believers will be saved, even if their actions were less than gold and silver.

This is because our salvation is not based upon anything we think, say, or do. Our salvation is solely based upon Jesus Christ and that empty tomb. Solely based upon his death upon the cross, his blood paying the debt owed by our sin and his resurrection into eternal life.

Which is why we are called to be strangers to this world.

We are called by God to not make this world, this culture and this societal norm, our home. We are to live here as sojourners, strangers and aliens, people who are here but not from here.

As I have often heard it put, we are called to 'be in the world, but not of the world.'

Christians are meant to know and understand that they are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven and that is from where we center all of our being. If we try to be citizens of Heaven and citizens of earth, we will find that we are constantly in a state of conflict.

Matthew 6:24

24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

We cannot serve both, they will conflict and that is why we live differently than the people of the world. We live in fear and reverence of the Lord our God. That word fear that is used in the bible is not the same word we know and use today. Today fear means to be afraid of something, biblically fear means to respect someone who had authority in your life. So, we are called to respect and revere God at all times in our life.

We respect and revere God because he ransomed us. This is a critical understanding of what happened upon the cross.

Matthew 20:28

even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus's blood paid the ransom for our lives. Once again this is a bit of theology that is often twisted in the modern church. There are people out there who think that ransom was paid to Satan, this is definitively not true. There are some who believe that the ransom was paid to God and in a sense this is true.

Once again with this teaching it is important to understand the cultural practices of the time. During Jesus's time, a person could go to the temple of their choice and give a sacrifice of money to redeem a slave of their choice. That money was given to the god so that god could use the money to purchase the slave from their master and as a result that slave was seen as being a free person, because they belonged to that god and not a mortal man.

When we look at Jesus's sacrifice upon the cross with this knowledge, we see the power of our redemption. Jesus does not give a sum of money to God, instead he gives something infinitely more valuable, his life and as a result of his sacrifice we are all free. Jesus Christ bought us our freedom from slavery to our sin through his blood. He brought us back into relationship with God through his sacrifice.

True believers were not redeemed with something of passing value, gold, or silver, which is ever shifting in value in our economies. Instead, we were purchased with the one thing which will never change in value, the blood of Christ.

We were purchased from our empty lives as slaves to sin, a way that we inherited from our forefathers into a new life of freedom in God's kingdom.

Pagan lifestyle and pagan life lead to nothing. Chasing the values of the world, power, money, and pleasure, leads to nothing. It is a life of futility, everything you gain in this world will be lost when we pass from this world. This is the only statistic that I know for certain is absolutely true, ten out of ten people die. When we chase the things of this world, we are trying to fill a cup full of holes with water. We will constantly be seeking more because we will never have enough, our values and ethics will constantly be shifting because we have no firm foundation to stand upon.

Instead of chasing this world's values and treasures we should be focused on the eternal treasure that is stored up for us in God's kingdom.

We are called to be different, to be strange, to be 'the odd man out' or prude or phobic, or any other word they choose to label us with in this world. We are called to be this way because in doing so we are obeying the Word of God and trying to be holy in that same way that He is holy.

We need to live 'in this world and not of this world' because we acknowledge that God is the creator, and he will come again to Judge the world justly and impartially.

We need to live 'in this world and not of this world' because we know that we have been redeemed, ransomed, purchased, whichever word you choose, by the blood of Christ upon the cross. We have been bought away from the empty life of the pursuit of our sinful nature into the fruitful life as a child of God.

This gift of grace, of salvation, by God to man is not something that one inherits from their family, it comes from our own personal belief, our own relationship with God. When you come to true faith you are adopted into God's family as a Son or Daughter and given the right to call him, 'Abba, Father'.

It comes through our understanding as Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior,

John 14:1-6

14 "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

No matter how many religions and spiritual people who are out that say there are many paths to God, there is only one God and one way to heaven, faith and obedience to Jesus Christ and God's Word. There are no ethnic barriers, no social barriers no economic barriers, anyone can come to God when he calls for them to 'come and see the risen Lord.'

There are no barriers, but there is only one path, one gate, one door. There is only one way to the father and that is Jesus Christ.

Matthew 7:13-14

13 "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Christians believe in the empty tomb, the Risen Lord, the one who is seated at the right hand of the Lord right now awaiting his time to sit in judgement of the world. The one who loved us so much that he willingly died upon the cross as a sacrifice to purchase our freedom from sin so that we could live eternally with him in His Kingdom. This is what Peter reminds us of in the scripture.

It is so easy in this world to get caught up and distracted by the worldly ways. It is easy to get caught up in our faith and make it about political decisions, or specific church buildings, denominations, people, or even theological patterns of change, but ultimately Peter is telling us that none of these matters. The only thing that matters is that your faith and hope rest in God alone.

If we make our faith dependent on any of the things of this world it will ultimately lead to our destruction. If our faith is based on Christ alone, we will have a life of peace, grace, and mercy.

When our faith is based on worldly things it is tainted by the world, it gets shaken by the truths that come out about members of the church and pastors who are not faithful to God's Word.

When our faith is based on worldly things it is tainted by the world, it gets altered by denominations who falter and begin to seek out worldly approval.

When our faith is based on worldly things it is tainted by the world, it gets shattered when prayers are not answer in the way we want, when we do not have that life of luxury that was promised or when illness and death enter our lives.

Christians need to center their faith on Christ alone, Christ is the one thing that never perishes, never changes, is never altered. Everything else in this world is corruptible, is tainted and is dependent on the will of man.

When our faith is centered on Christ alone, we have salvation, and in that we have peace, hope, and joy. We know we are accountable for our lives, and we know that even though we will fall short of holiness we do not need to worry, because the debt of slavery to sin has been paid by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

People of God, know that as you leave here this day, if you are a true follower of Christ your salvation is secure, you will be judged so live in respect and reverence of God and His Word, so that on that day of Judgement, when you stand before the White throne, the one who is seated there to Judge all of mankind justly and impartially, will look upon you and say to you, 'well done my good and faithful servant'.

Let us Pray,

Praise, Thanks, Confession of Faith

*Glory be to you, almighty Father,
you have given to those who fear you
the heavenly bread of life,
that we may be mindful of the marvels
which you have done on the earth,
by sending us your only Son,
fully human,
born of a pure virgin.*

*We give you thanks, holy Father,
for you created us before we were,
and while we were still sinners you made us partakers of your heavenly grace;*

*through your Son, our Lord and God,
who with you and the Holy Spirit
makes, orders, and rules all things, now and forever. Amen.*

Source: Dunstan of Canterbury

Hymn: “Christ is Mine Forever More”

Mine are days that God has numbered; I was made to walk with Him.
Yet I look for worldly treasure and forsake the King of kings.
But mine is hope in my Redeemer; though I fail, His love is sure.
For Christ has paid for ev'ry failing; I am His forever more,

Mine are tears in times of sorrow, darkness not yet understood.
Through the valley I must travel where I see no earthly good.
But mine is peace that flows from heaven, and the strength in times of need.
I know my pain will not be wasted; Christ completes His work in me.

Mine are days here as a stranger, pilgrim on a narrow way.
One with Christ I will encounter harm and hatred for His name.
But mine is armour for this battle strong enough to last the war.
And He has said He will deliver safely to the golden shore.

CHORUS

And mine are keys to Zion city where beside the King I walk.
For there my heart has found its treasure, Christ is mine forevermore.

BRIDGE

Come rejoice now, O my soul, for His love is my reward.
Fear is gone and hope is sure, Christ is mine forevermore.

CHORUS

And mine are keys to Zion city where beside the King I walk.
For there my heart has found its treasure Christ is mine forevermore.
Christ is mine forevermore.

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspert offering@gmail.com If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer

(Congregant Prepared)

Closing Hymn #324: "Great is Thy Faithfulness"

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Refrain:

Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in eloquent witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. [Refrain]

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! [Refrain]

Pastoral Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
We draw near to you in prayer this day,
trusting that your love does change lives
and your resurrection brings renewal and redemption into the world God loves.
As we lay before you the concerns on our hearts today,
we pray that you will draw near to the people and situations we name
and bring each one the gift that is needed:

We lay before you, Lord, the concerns we share from the news headlines

and the many world situations where hope and change are desperately needed.

We lay before you, Lord, those who are in hospital or care
and all those who struggle with illness, pain, or health burdens of any sort;
and we remember those facing grief and loss, bearing burdens of sorrow and worry.

We lay before you, Lord, families under stress, relationships that are strained,
friends and neighbours in need of reconciliation,
and we pray for the healing of divisions in our country.

Loving God,
we believe that you hear our prayers and will be faithful to our requests and concerns.
Use us in every opportunity that presents itself to serve you
by serving our neighbours near and far.
We pray in the name of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Benediction

Go out into the world in peace;
have courage;
hold on to what is good;
return no one evil for evil;
strengthen the fainthearted;
support the weak, and help the suffering;
honor all people;
love and serve the Lord,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit in all you do.

Amen.