







1 Peter: The Key to the Door that Leads Us ... Beyond the Walls with Jesus

Joel D. Lehenbauer
Commission on Theology and Church Relations
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Living Holy and Hopeful Lives as God's Peculiar People (in today's not-so-holy or hopeful world)

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Luther on 1 Peter:

- "1 Peter is one of the noblest books in the New Testament: it is the genuine and pure Gospel."
- 1 Peter is "a paragon of excellence" that contains "genuinely evangelical words."
- "He who understands this epistle undoubtedly has enough and needs no more."
- "The apostle has forgotten here nothing that a Christian must know."

• Martin Franzmann:

"Anyone looking for a key book that will unlock for him the meaning of the whole New Testament would do well to give his days and nights to this letter."

(The Word of the Lord Grows, 225)

• 1 Peter 2:9 (KJV):

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

"Peculiarity" on the increase (again)...

Post-Christendom (2004, Stuart Murray): The contemporary church in America is shifting--

- From the center to the margins
- From the majority to the minority
- From settlers to sojourners
- From privilege to plurality (or pluralism)
- From control to witness
- From maintenance to mission
- From institution to movement (Cf.: "Beyond the Walls with Jesus")

The present and future cultural Anfechtung:

- ➤ Pew Forum Survey on US Religious Landscape (2008)
 ➤ American Religious Identification Survey (2009)
 - - •30% of adults have left childhood faith (41% of Protestant "church-swappers" included)
 - •"Nones" double to 15% (age 18-29: +25%) (very few "Nones" are "Seekers")
 - •Barely half of Americans identify as "Protestant Christians"
 - Protestantism increasingly divided and fragmented
 - •RCC: greatest net loss (down 7% to 24%)
 - •Those who self-identify as "Christians" down 11%

National Study of Youth and Religion (2009)

- Only 20% of age 18-23 attend religious services weekly
- Down 22% from same survey 5 years ago
- "Morality is how I feel"
- De facto doubts about "identifiable, objective, shared reality"
- Karma: "What goes around comes around"
- "Emerging Adulthood" period growing longer
- Religious youth more socially concerned, involved
- Families, religious institutions failing
- "I'll go back to church when I have children" (!!)

2014 Pew Research Survey on LCMS

- Seldom read Bible or pray: 53%
- Weekly church attendance: 47%
- Belief in moral absolutes: 44%
- Primary source of moral guidance: Religion, 41%; Common Sense, 45%; Reason/Science: 14%.
- Bible should be taken literally: 40%
- Abortion should be legal: 46%
- Homosexuality should be accepted: 56% (SSM: 45%)
- Humans evolved by design or nature: 50%
- Hell exists: 75% (Heaven: 88%)

First words in First Peter:

"Petros apostolos Yesou Christou,

eklektois, parepidemois..."

"... to the chosen ones, strangers in the world"

("pilgrims, resident aliens")

Peter 1:17: "Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as *strangers* here in reverent fear ..."

1 Peter 2:4: "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him you also, like living stones are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

1 Peter 2:11: "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 may accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

1 Peter 4:12: "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ ..."

Israel: Old, True, New: The Same Old Story

- Exodus 19:3-6: "My treasured possession ... a kingdom of priests ... a holy nation."
- Exodus 20: "Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16)
- Exodus 24: The blood of the covenant
- **Deut. 7:7-8**: "The Lord did **not** choose you because ..."
- **Deut. 10:14-19**: Aliens and strangers, then and now

- John Elliott: The terms for "resident aliens" in 1 Peter "designated a class of people considered inferior to the full citizens and accorded only limited legal and social rights" (marriage, inheritance, business, civic and political involvement).
- Gotlob Schrenk (TDNT): "1 Peter takes seriously the strangeness of the Christian community ... and provides a theological reason for remaining aliens "

• Luther on 1 Peter 2:12: "Since you are not of this world, you must act like a stranger in an inn [cf. Jesus!] who does not have his possession there but is only on a stop-over where we cannot remain. We must proceed on our journey ... We are citizens of heaven; on earth we are pilgrims and guests."

• TLH General Prayer: "And as we are strangers and pilgrims on earth, help us by true faith and a godly life to prepare for the world to come; doing the work Thou hast given us to do while it is day; before the night cometh when no man can work."

• LSB 748 (Escapism or Biblical Realism?): "I'm But a Stranger Here, Heav'n is my Home ..."

Peter offers 1st-century insights and theological resources for a 21st-century ...

- Reality check: Christians are no longer "in control" as the primary movers, shakers, and shapers of America's social, political and cultural identity, ideals and values.
- (Question: Is this a good thing or a bad thing?)

Peter offers 1st-century insights and theological resources for a 21st-century ...

 Attitude adjustment: We can moan, groan and complain, we can reminisce about and long for "the good old days" when America was seen by many as "Christian nation"—or, we can seek to reclaim our true identity and calling as "God's chosen ones, strangers in the world ..."

Peter offers 1st-century insights and theological resources for a 21st-century ...

•Strategic realignment: Peter offers a challenging and hopeful strategy for the church's survival and for sharing the Gospel of Christ in an increasingly "alien," non-Christian culture.

CIF1P—1: It's All About Hope

 In a post-church culture where hope is viewed primarily (and hopelessly divisively) in terms of social, cultural and political change and "progress," Christians are called to cultivate and manifest a cross-andresurrection centered HOPE that both challenges and ultimately transcends all social and political realities, changes or trends (whether "positive" or "negative").

Notice Peter's emphasis on the Christian's present and future **hope** (1:3, 13, 21; 3:15):

- "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living **hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade ..." (1:3)
- "Set your **hope** fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed." (1:13)

- "Through [Christ] you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."
 (1:21)
- "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the **hope** that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect ..." (3:15)

Hebrews 11:13-16: "All these (saints of old) were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they 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 ... they were longing for a **better country**—a heavenly one."

CIF1P—2: "Heaven is My Home": A Fixated and Full-Bodied Hope

 In a post-church culture whose theme song is "I want it ALL and I want it NOW," pilgrim-Christians are called to recognize the fleeting and transitory nature of all earthly things (1:18, 23-25) and to fix their hearts and minds on the glory to be revealed in them and to them when Jesus comes again.

Notice Peter's emphasis on the paroikous ("homeless ones") awaiting the parousia (homecoming/homegoing) of Christ with and for his saints: 1:5-9, 13, 20-21; 2:12; 3:21-22; 4:5-7, 13, 17-19; 5:10-11; 2 Peter 3:3-13.

- "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever." (1:24-25)
- "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (1:8-9)

Through this "living and enduring" word of God: "You have been born again … into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1:23; 4-5).

"The end of all things is near" (1 Peter 4:7).

Luther on 1 Peter 4:7: "It is not to be expected that mankind will see two or three thousand years after the birth of Christ."

(The SC is delightfully "earthy" and yet deeply eschatological in nature)

Question: Does this transcendent (eschatological) perspective mean abandoning all hope for and effort toward cultural change and transformation?

• C.S. Lewis: "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought the most of the next ... [they] left their mark on earth precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven."

"Aim at heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in.' Aim at earth and you will get neither."

CIF1P—3: The Truth Will Set You Free:

A Radical and Subversive Hope

 In a post-church culture where TRUTH is defined primarily in personal, subjective, relativistic terms, Christians are called to reclaim, defend and explain—with infinite patience, respect, and gentleness—the particularistic and exclusivist truth claims centered in the unique person, work, and words of the One who claimed to be THE truth, way, and life.

(Includes apologetics—e.g., natural law; but ...)

- "The church is a people on a journey who insist on living consistent with the conviction that God is the lord of history ... the cross and the resurrection [not world or national politics] determine the meaning of history." (Stanley Hauerwas, *Ten Theses*, 5-6)
- (Hauerwas calls this "living out of control" as followers of Christ.)

- For Peter (and Luther!), history is literally "**His story**" from beginning to end (1:10-12, 18-21; 2:4-8, 24; 3:18-22; 5:10-11).
- "It was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ ... He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake." (1:18-20)

- "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God ... the **word of the Lord** stands forever. (1:23-25)
- "... in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to *give an answer* to everyone who asks you to give *the reason* for the hope you have ..." (3:15)

• One advantage of living in a postmodern, narrative-friendly culture: everyone (at least theoretically) has the right and freedom to "give an answer" and tell their own story, no matter how "strange" it may sound!

CIF1P—4: *Show* So You Can Tell: A Living Hope is also a Lived Hope

 In a post-church culture where morality is viewed almost exclusively in terms of personal freedom and choice, Christians are called to embrace with grace-centered freedom and zeal Christ's call to holiness (loveliness) of life, both as a judgment on the world's behavior (mirror) and as a visual invitation (portrait) to begin a conversation about the possibility of enjoying a richer, more abundant and fulfilling way of life in Christ.

• Note Peter's strong and pervasive emphasis on holiness of *life* as a *prelude to* and *prerequisite for* bearing verbal witness to the Gospel of Christ (1:13-16, 17-18; 2:1-2, 9-10, 11-12, 13-17; 3:1-7; 3:15; 4:1-6.)

- 1 Peter 1:14-16: "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."
- 1 Peter 2:11-12: "I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires ... 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."

- "For it is God's will that **by doing good** you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God." (1:15-16)
- "Wives ... be submissive to your husbands, so that if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over *without words* by the *behavior* of their wives, when they see *the purity and reverence of your lives*." (3:1-2)
- "Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you ..." (3:15) (Question: Why would they ask?)

- Too much talk about "holiness" tends to make Lutherans nervous. However:
- SC, LP 2: "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and *lead godly lives* here in time and there in eternity."
- Why should we live holy lives? Out of love for and gratitude to God, and ...

...love for our neighbor.

Luther on 1 Peter 2:12: Why be holy? "That I may be saved?" Of course not. Rather:

"I should maintain this good conduct not in my own interest; I must do so in order that the Gentiles may mend their ways and be attracted by it, that they may also come to Christ through us, which is a true work of love."

CIF1P—5: The Greatest of These: The Passion and Compassion of Hope

- In a post-church culture where LOVE is viewed merely as tolerance and acceptance, Christians are called to recommit themselves to demonstrating a love that is so deeply and passionately committed to the wellbeing of our neighbor that we are willing to lay down our very lives for our friends—and our enemies.
- Above all, Christians are to live in such a way that the world says in awe and amazement: "See how they love one another!" (1:22; 2:1; 3:8-12; 4:7-9; 5:13; cf. 1 John)

- "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart." (1:22)
- "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and tender-hearted" (3:8).
- "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins." (4:8)

"Any Christian engagement with the outside culture is shaped by the internal life of the church."

(Russell Moore, *Onward*, 2015)

Luther on 1 Peter 3:8 ("Love as brothers, be compassionate and tender-hearted..."):

- "If you want to be certain that you are doing a precious and God-pleasing work, then have sympathy, be tender-hearted, and be friendly."
- "Bear in mind that you must be friendly,' says
 Peter. These are truly precious, golden works, gems
 and pearls that please God."

CIF1P—6: Our Home Away from Home: The Church as a Community of Hope

 In a post-church culture where the needs, desires, choices, pursuits and accomplishments of the individual are idealized and idolized, Christians are called to set aside their own personal agendas—and escape the loneliness, boredom, isolation and emptiness of a life centered in self as they commit themselves to living in *community* with other "strangers and aliens" (1:22; 2:4-10; 3:8; 4:10-11; 5:1-9).

There's That Tension Again...

- Luther: "Read with great emphasis these words 'me, for me" in the Bible, "and apply this 'me' to yourself with certain faith."
- Peter: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God ..." (2:9)
- Luther (3rd article): "In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers."

Factors that increase the odds of dying early:

- •5%: Air pollution
 - •20%: Obesity
- •30%: Alcohol/Substance Abuse
 - **4**5%...

•45%: Loneliness

"We think of loneliness as a sad condition. But for social species, being on the social perimeter is not only sad, it is dangerous ... Humans are not made to be alone. The need for companionship is elemental to our nature — wired into our brains."

(http://www.jsonline.com/news/wisconsin/loneliness-darkens-twilight-years-b99633777z1-363049741.html)

The critical need for "Recovering the Corporate Life" in *Engaging our Culture Faithfully* (by Harold Senkbeil)

(Concordia Journal 40:4, Fall 2014, 306-7)

CIF1P—7: This Might Hurt: The Christ-like Toughness of Hope

 In a post-church culture where suffering is viewed as an alien experience and an unfair intrusion into a life of leisure and pleasure, Christians are called to "buck up" and to be ready to endure (patiently, willingly, and even joyfully) the suffering that will inevitably be experienced by those who (like Christ) seek mercilessly and mercifully to expose, challenge, and criticize the world's values, attitudes, behaviors, and ideals.

- How seriously do we (and today's catechumens) really take this question: "Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" ("I do, by the grace of God"--??)
- Those who truly see themselves as *strangers* in this world, and who put their hope in the strange power of God revealed in the weakness of Christ's cross, should not think it strange to be asked to follow in his steps (1:2, 6-7, 11; 2:4, 11-12, 18-25; 3:9-18; 4:1-5, 12-19; 5:6-11).

- "In this [your salvation] you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith ... may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." (1:6-7)
- "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." (2:21)
- "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." (4:12-13)

Faithful Suffering = Faithful Witness

Luther on 1 Peter 1:16: "The greatest work that comes from faith is this, that I confess Christ with my mouth and, if it has to be, bear testimony with my blood and risk my life. Yet God does not need the work; I should do it to prove and confess my faith, in order that others, too, may be brought to faith."

CIF1P—8: The Masks of God: A Humble and Down-to-Earth Hope

 In an alien culture where Christians are ridiculed and mistreated, we may be tempted to withdraw from the world and avoid engagement with the world. Peter urges us as "resident aliens" to stay put, to remain busy and content wherever God has placed us, and to carry out faithfully our various and diverse—and deceptively humble—God-given vocations (Luther: "masks of God") in the world and in the church.

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should to it as speaking the very words of God, If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 4:10-11)

Luther: "St. Peter is addressing these words to all Christians, to priests, to laymen, men and women, young and old, and in whatever station they are in" (105).

As "strangers and aliens" on earth, we are to serve Christ and our neighbor in all of our various vocations (cf. Table of Duties!):

- Christian citizens (2:13-17)
- "slaves" (employees) of others (2:18)
- wives and husbands (3:1-7)
- pastors, under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd (5:1-4)
- members (both young and old) of Christ's flock (5:5)

In order for the church to be what God has called it to be, "we must recapture the social significance of common behavior, such as acts of kindness, friendship, and formation of families."

(Hauerwas, Ten Theses, 8)

• Luther's Catechisms (and even sermons) were directed and geared toward the "common person." They highlight the significance of seemingly mundane works of service as precious and holy to God and essential acts of neighborly love and concern.

CIF1P—9: Authentic Diversity in Perfect Unity: The Richness of Hope

 In a post-church culture that often celebrates and trumpets "diversity" falsely, selectively and (therefore) divisively, God's chosen people from every nation, tribe, and language (Rev. 7) celebrate and seek to demonstrate a *genuine* and *authentic* diversity that is God-pleasing and God-given, welcoming strangers, aliens, and "rejects" of every kind and in every place into the perfect, Spiritgiven, baptismal unity of God's incredibly and wonderfully diverse family.

- "To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia ..." (1:1)
- "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house ..." (2:4-5)
- "Always be prepared to give an answer to *everyone* who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." (3:15)
- Global use and significance of Small Catechism!

CIF1P—10: Practice Makes "Perfect": The Sobriety of Hope

 In a post-church culture in which self-discipline and self-control have largely become lost arts, Christians are called to re-learn and put into practice the spiritual disciplines that will sustain them in times of suffering, uncertainty, and cultural upheaval: obedient submission to authority (both divine and human); study of God's Word; prayer, worship and service (1:1, 13-14; 2:1-2, 11-14, 17-18; 3:1, 7; 4:7-11; 5:5, 8, 10-11).

- You "have been chosen ... through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for **obedience** to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood ..." (1:2)
- "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be selfcontrolled ... As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance ... 'Be holy, because I am holy." (1:13-14)
- "Show proper respect to everyone: love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king." (2:17)
- SC: Ten Commandments, Table of Duties, Daily Prayers, Confession, Baptism, etc.

CIF1P—11: It's Not (Just) a "Culture War": The Enemies of Hope

 Wherever and whenever God's peculiar people confront resistance, hostility, or even persecution from the earthly "powers that be," it is especially crucial to remember that our real and paramount struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, powers and authorities of this dark world, "against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12).

• "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in your faith, knowing that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings." (1 Peter 5:8-9)

• "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled, so you can pray." (1 Peter 4:7)

- "Crumbs" (*Brosamen*) from C. F. W. Walther on 1 Peter 4:7-8:
- "The end of all things is at hand; therefore ... above, all"—what?

God Grant It (CPH, 2006), 448-449

CIF1P—12: Amazing Grace:

Hope as a Sheer Undeserved Gift

 In a post-church culture that (like every) non-Christian culture, secular or religious) views "spirituality" in terms of human striving to get closer to God and/or to become like God, Christians are called to put their trust in and devote their lives to the "God of all GRACE" (1 Peter 5:10), who "came down from heaven" to us and for us and graciously serves us in Christ alone (the Word made flesh).

Peter's first and last words are words of sheer Christ-centered **GRACE**:

- "To God's chosen ones, strangers in the world ... **Grace and peace** be yours in abundance." (1:1-2).
- "Set your hope fully on the **grace** to be given to you when Jesus Christ is revealed." (1:13)

- "And the **God of all grace**, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 5:10-11)
- "I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true **grace** of God. **Stand fast in it!**" (1 Peter 5:12)

Small Catechism, Second Article:

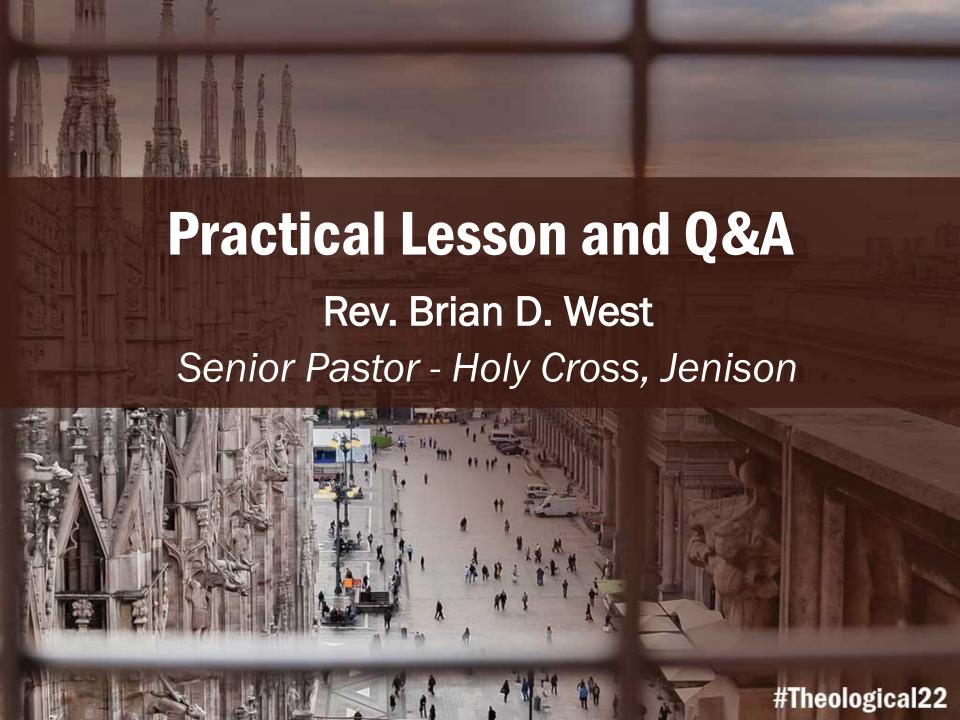
"He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death, that I may be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true!"

Luther (on 1 Peter 2:9): "We live on earth only so that we should be a help to other people. Otherwise, it would be best if God would strangle us and let us die as soon as we were baptized and had begun to believe. For this reason, however, he lets us live: that we may bring other people to faith as he has done for us."

Table Talk

- How do Peter's words about Christians as "aliens and strangers" play out in your daily life in your various vocations? What challenges and opportunities does this "strangeness" present for Christian witness today?
- Do you think most non-churched people today look at Christians and say: "See how they love each other?" If not, how serious a problem is that for the church's mission and how might it be addressed on various "levels" of the church's existence?
- Do you think we talk/preach/teach enough (or too much?)
 as Lutherans today about the importance of living a holy
 life? Explain your answer and discuss.
- Do you think we talk/preach/teach enough (or too much?) as Lutherans today about the hope of heaven and eternal life? Explain your answer and discuss.





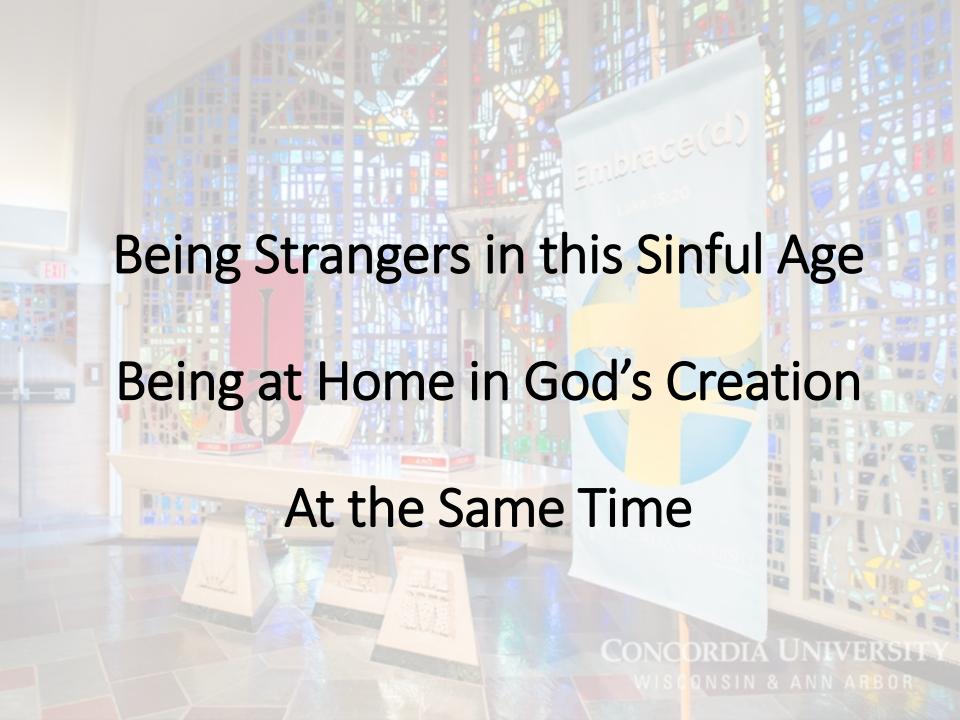






Strangers, Yet at Home: Going Beyond the Walls in Humility

Rev. Dr. Theodore J. Hopkins, PhD
Pre-Seminary Director; Family Life Ministry Director
Associate Prof. of Theology
Concordia University, Ann Arbor



Learning to See through the Gospel

 We must practice the habit of seeing the world not through political eyes, which only causes a greater rift between church and world, but through the eyes of the Gospel of Jesus.

The Outline

- Stephen Pickard's "natural heresies of the church" (Seeking the Church: An Introduction to Ecclesiology [SCM Press, 2012])
 - The desacralized church and sacred inflation
- Politicization of the church as sacred inflation
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer's July 23, 1933 Sermon on Matthew 16
 - We are all Peter, both confessors and deniers
 - God builds his church; we only witness
- Conclusion: Humility as the strange way of being at home as witnesses

Pickard's Natural Heresies of the Church

- Desacralized church
 - Sociological reality, not theological
 - Group of religious people, like-minded individuals



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Desacralized Church: What does God have to do with this community?

- Conforming to the world's ways
- Identity in ethics or social justice
- The danger of the attractional model of church growth



Photo by Vishnu R Nair from Pexels

Pickard's Natural Heresies of the Church

- Sacred Inflation
 - Church overly-identified with God
 - No need for repentance, confession, or change
 - Church separated from world



Photo by Matteo Basile from Pexels

Sacred Inflation: The "Bossing Dynamic"

 Boniface VIII: All human creatures must be subject to the Roman pontiff.



Photo by Aliona & Pasha from Pexels

Fear of the Disappearing Church



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The Need to Distinguish Church and World

- Understandable but dangerous to fear the loss of cultural privilege as the loss of the church itself
 - Temptation to sacred inflation

Politicization and the Problem of Sacred Inflation



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Politicization as Sacred Inflation

- The great irony is that, in trying to inflate the church and emphasize its difference from the world, we have actually desacralized the very church that we claim is holy.
- Inflating church culture in Rod Dreher's Benedict Option
 - "project of culture reconstruction"—Derek W. Taylor, "Bonhoeffer and the Benedict Option," Ecclesiology 14 (2018): 25.
- Peter Wehner, "The Evangelical Church is Breaking Up," The Atlantic, October 24, 2021.
 - "When the Christian faith is politicized, churches become repositories not of grace but of grievances, places where tribal identities are reinforced, where fears are nurtured, and where aggression and nastiness is sacralized."



The Humility of Jesus Against Politics of Power



Photo by Pixabay from Pexels: https://www.pexels.com/photo/brown-jesus-artwork-33591/

Sacred Inflation and Original Sin

 We seek to make the church divine rather than receive it as such through God's will and means



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Humble Lord, Humble Church



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Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Church in a Contested World

- Sermon on July 23, 1933
 - Matthew 16

 Same day as church election that pitted Confessing Church candidates against German Christian candidates that Hitler himself supported publicly.

The Contrast of Church and World

 "The issue is really Germanism or Christianity, and the sooner the conflict comes out in the open the better." –Dietrich Bonhoeffer letter to his grandmother, August 20, 1933. (Berlin: 1932-33, vol. 12 of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009], 159. From here on out DWBE 12.)

"This must be stronger than that."—Jon Tyson's summary of Bonhoeffer

Bonhoeffer's Sermon on Matthew 16: Preached on July 23, 1933

- Seeing the eternal church in the crumbling of Christendom
 - Not in a place of power but on the outskirts

"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God"

 Peter's confession is "no longer human thinking but rather the very opposite; this is divine revelation and confession of faith." (DBWE 12, 479)

 The church is weak, the world strong. The church has nothing except as God reveals and gives himself for us; the world has plenty that it claims about itself.

Peter is the Church

- "What's the difference between Peter and the others" (DBWE 12, 479).
- "Does he have such a heroic nature that he rises head and shoulders above them? He does not. Does he have unmatched strength of character? He does not. Does have such unshakable loyalty? He does not. Peter is nobody really, nobody but a person who confesses, a person who has met Christ ... and who now confesses his faith in Christ" (DBWE 12, 479).
- Jesus is everything; we are nothing.



Peter as Denier and Doubter

 "We are all Peter, not the pope, as the Catholics say, not this person or that person, but all of us who are just living by our confession of Christ, as fearful, disloyal persons of little faith, but who are held fast by God" (DBWE 12, 480).

God Builds!

- "We are to confess, while God builds. We are to preach, while God builds. We are to pray to God, while God builds. We do not know God's plan. We cannot see whether God is building up or taking down" (DBWE 12, 480).
- "You confess, preach, bear witness to me, but I alone will do the building, wherever I am pleased to do so. Don't interfere with my orders. Church, if you do your own part right, then that is enough"—Jesus (DBWE 12, 480).

This is Enough Because Jesus Builds His Church

- Humble Witness
- Means of Grace
- Deeds of Service
- Teaching the Faith
- Confess Jesus

The Eternal Church Hidden Among Us

• "The church that confesses is the eternal church, for Christ is its protector. Its eternity is not visible to this world. It is not subject to challenge by the world, though the waves wash up over it and sometimes it looks completely covered over and lost. But victory belongs to the church, because Christ its Lord is with it and has overcome the world of death" (DBWE 12, 481).

Beyond the Walls as Strangers, Yet at Home

- Strangers: The difference of the church from the world
 - Live by faith and humility not power
 - Be comfortable being different
- At Home: Not different because of us but because of Jesus
 - We are sinners, doubters, and deniers like Peter and like the world
 - We need Jesus who died for the world
 - Jesus made this world his home
- Beyond the walls in humility, letting God build

