

“After a Little While”

I Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11; Psalm 68:8-10, 32-35

Psalm 68:8-10, 32-35

⁸The earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain
at the presence of God, the God of Sinai,
at the presence of God, the God of Israel.

⁹Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad;
you restored your heritage when it languished;
¹⁰your flock found a dwelling in it;
in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.

³²Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth;
sing praises to the Lord,

³³O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens;
listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.

³⁴Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel;
and whose power is in the skies.

³⁵Awesome is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel;
he gives power and strength to his people.

Blessed be God!

John 17:1-11

¹After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said,
‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify
you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal
life to all whom you have given him.

³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and
Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time.

Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your siblings throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.

To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

The Sermon

In a lovely small town in the northwest corner of Illinois is a residential care facility called Hillcrest Home.

The week before last, Hillcrest Home posted on Facebook a series of photographs of some of their residents, each in their own room, holding a dry erase board on which was written one piece of advice that that person had for all the young people who are graduating this month.

It was called “Advice from Our Seniors to the Seniors of 2020,” and among the words of wisdom that the nursing home residents had for people just graduating from whatever they might be graduating from were signs that said:

Be truthful in everything you do and say.

Listen to your Mom & Dad.

Follow your dreams.

Be the best you can be.

Talk out your problems.

Stop procrastinating; focus on the future now.

Do the right thing.

Keep a smile on your face.

Sometimes you have to figure it out on your own.

Have faith, hope, charity and love.

Staying outside is the secret to a long life.

Eat something sweet each day.

Be dependable.

Be good to others and they will be good to you.

Always focus on the good.
Laughing makes life better.
Be happy.
Be a good person.ⁱ

Clearly, these are people who have learned some things along the way.

But, of course, back in the day, *their* elders had been willing to share wisdom with them, too.

Not too much is known about the author of I Peter. It was almost certainly written between 70 and 90, so 40-60 years after the crucifixion: long enough for Christianity to have spread, but early enough that in many places it was still seen as mysterious, and foreign, and therefore threatening enough to lead anxious and unstable people to mistreat and abuse their neighbors who were converting to it.

So it was to those recent converts to Christianity, young in the faith regardless of their age, that this letter was put together by someone writing in the trusted name of Peter—

one who, after one harrowing and sorrowful instance of having been afraid of how he might suffer for being associated with Jesus, practically embraced the opportunity to suffer for Christ from then on.

Maybe those new Christians, who were just beginning to taste the freedom of knowing who God is, and by implication what that meant that they were—beloved and most welcome children of the Creator of the Cosmos—

and having some sense now of what God wanted with them and the world they lived in,

maybe those who were just beginning to think through and live into how they were going to reorient their lives and hearts and priorities, now that

they knew that it's all about love and generosity and grace and mercy and belonging and abundant life for all,

maybe these new converts didn't yet know what they didn't know.

In other words, this whole new life sounds great, and it is. But in a world that doesn't trust love as strong and giving as God's love, but only understands quid pro quo—you give me this, and I'll give you that, but only on the condition that I gain something from this that I want for me—

in that world, *this* world, acceptance is not guaranteed. And those for whom you are trying to live as an example of goodness, kindness and faith in God may give you back only coldness, bitterness, even violence.

That might not even come from outside the family, but inside.

I think again of my first week on the job after seminary, going to serve as half-time pastor of a very small church while simultaneously serving as associate pastor of a 450-member church. One of my new colleagues made sure I was paying attention when he mentioned that it was possible that the people at the small church *might* be looking to the new pastor coming in to be some kind of savior.

I thought, "How precious!"

Then he said: "And saviors get crucified."

And I thought: "Oh, boy..."

In the event, that small church did a lot more to save me than I ever could have done for them, and both churches did for me what this writer is doing for the new Christians receiving this letter: sharing the wisdom of one who knows of what they speak.

Don't be surprised at the ordeal you're going through. It happens.

If you're going through anything like what Jesus did in order to be who he was, so that you can be the emissary of God's astonishing love that you want to be, that is something to rejoice about.

Humble yourself under God's mighty hand; you'll be exalted soon enough.

Cast all your anxiety on God, because God cares for you.

Have some self-discipline, because saying "the devil made me do it" doesn't count for much when you think of what people are going through in other parts of the world just to be faithful to God and each other.

And remember this: that after you have gone through your ordeal, for this little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to eternal glory in Christ, will personally restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.

When, in John's gospel, Jesus had given his last will and testament to the disciples: the final lecture, the moral of the story, the pep talk before the biggest and most consequential game of their lives, his closing argument, his magnum opus,

his prayer wasn't about the whole world, though Jesus was about to give his life for the whole world.

It wasn't for the glory of the cosmos, although through him, God was about to glorify the whole cosmos.

It wasn't for the planet, although with what Jesus was about to do, the planet would never be the same.

It was for them, the ones who had tasted and seen that God is good—

the ones for whom a light had shone in the darkness, and to whom in the next three days it was about to look very much like the darkness just might have overcome it.

And the fervent prayer Jesus lifted up to God for all of them was not to enrich or promote or entitle or exalt them. It was:

“Protect them, so that they may be one, as you and I are one.”

As the God of Abraham and the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Savior are all one, you and I and our siblings everywhere, around the world and in our own neighborhoods and in the next neighborhood, are all meant to be one. One common humanity. One world.

One body, whose health, welfare and chance at life is only as strong as the least healthy, the poorest, the most oppressed and forgotten and maligned member.

Every so often in life, for faithful people as for anybody else, things are going to get tough once in a while.

What words of wisdom have you received that help you through the challenging times?

And what words of wisdom, concise enough to fit on a small dry erase board, would you give to young people, or people who are just now beginning a relationship with God?

*Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad;
you restored your heritage when it languished;
your flock found a dwelling in it;
in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.*

Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth;

*sing praises to the Lord,
O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens;
listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.*

He gives power and strength to his people.

Thanks be to God.

Keith Grogg
Montreat Presbyterian Church
Montreat, NC
May 24, 2020

ⁱ <https://www.facebook.com/HillcrestHomeHenryCty/> Photos posted May 14, 2020