

The Third Sunday of Easter
April 30, 2017
1 Peter 1:17-21
The Great Cost of our New Way of Life
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Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

My maternal grandpa was the doctor in a small mining town in central Pennsylvania. The mining industry overshadowed the community both literally and psychologically. The people lived in reverent fear of the owners who held livelihoods in the palm of their hands. The mine touched every aspect of the residents' lives.

Early Christians in Asia Minor lived under the shadow of Jesus' empty tomb that touched every aspect of their lives. Now they had a Father, the heavenly Father who judges our work impartially. He judges us on the basis of Christ's righteousness. Since we have that gift, we live in reverent fear of our Father who takes care of us.

St. Peter wrote to encourage them with this truth. That Father had purchased them for his own at great cost for a new way of life in faith and hope. That great cost was, of course, his very Son.

The Great Cost of our New Way of Life. Not precious metals, but the precious blood of Christ is the great cost. Faith and hope in God are our new way of life.

We learned from Luther's catechism of our redemption's great cost; not gold or silver, but Jesus' holy, precious blood. We confess this cost in the Second Article of our creeds. The value of all the world's precious metals combined could not have paid the debt of our sin to God. Only the blood of God and man in one person would do it. All the sacrificial animals without blemish or defect offered prior to Jesus' cross foreshadowed his blood.

From what had their Father redeemed these new Christians? These Christians previously had lived an empty way of life inherited from their forefathers. It had been a life of paganism and polytheism. They lived their lives in baseless superstition and vain attempts to appease their gods with useless sacrifices. They had no security or hope. Sounds all too familiar.

The Christians now suffered social harassment because they rejected all that for new life in Christ. The Holy Spirit had called them out of that life through the good news of Christ Peter and other Christians had shared with them. That empty life continued to surround them and harass them. The Roman persecutions under Nero were spreading into Asia Minor. Thus Peter's written words of encouragement. Good words of encouragement for us.

These believers, as all believers, were now "strangers" in that world. We do not conform to this world. Rather we live reverently with respect, honor, and fear of our Father who loved us so much he paid the ultimate cost of our redemption; the holy blood of his Son, Jesus Christ.

The temptation always is to conform to the values and practices of the present world that surrounds us. That is the urging of our sinful flesh. That would seem to be the easiest with the least path of resistance. We need to remember this way of life is empty because it is godless. It is empty because it is temporary. It is empty because it is faithless and hopeless.

When we bought our homes, we made a down payment. We often pay our debts off in increments. Not so with the new way of life we have in the blood of Christ. Jesus made one payment on the cross. Jesus' payment was all sufficient and universal. Jesus' resurrection from the dead is our Father's receipt marked "Paid in full."

It is in the shadow of Jesus' empty tomb, the Christians in Asia Minor no longer lived an empty way of life. Jesus' empty tomb loomed over them. It touched every aspect of their lives. The

owner of that empty tomb now took care of them and provided all they needed, especially strength for their faith and hope through his Word. Now faith and hope in God are our new way of life.

This new way of life is God's eternal plan for us. Peter wrote, "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last days for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead, and glorified him, and so that your faith and hope are in God."

This is why the Holy Spirit has revealed Jesus to us in these last days. Our Father does not want our lives to be empty in the love of sin, and hopeless in unbelief. He wants us to enjoy the fullness of life in the hatred of sin, and have certain hope through faith in our Savior. Our Father wants us to know that he judges us impartially. He does not hold our sins against us, or reward us for doing our duty to his will. He judges us solely on the basis of Christ's sacrifice through which he declares our sins forgiven and our good works pleasing to him as an expression of our love. He judges us not guilty by Christ's righteous blood, a righteousness that is ours by grace through faith.

Any time your life looks empty and meaningless, remember that Jesus' empty tomb touches every aspect of your life. Jesus' tomb is empty not our lives on this earth. Jesus' abandoned tomb is the central focus of our lives. That tomb gives meaning to even the most seemingly menial and repetitive aspects of our existence. In fact, Christians do not merely exist. We live with faith and with hope in God.

This Sunday is also called Jubilate, Rejoice. God chose his Son from eternity to redeem us lost and condemned creatures; not with gold or silver but with his holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He did all this 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.

Rejoice! Faith and hope in God move us to do that very thing. Amen. <SDG>