

You know those little sentences I speak at sermon-time before I read the text for the sermon? Those are all Bible passages. They're not just throw-aways, or something to give you a little time to settle down after the hymn before we get into things; many of them are greetings from the beginning of New Testament Letters written by the Apostles.

Today it would be appropriate to use parts from the first verses of Peter's letter. "To the elect, temporary residents in the world...²... Grace and peace be multiplied to you" (1 Peter 1:1-2, EHV).

1 Peter 1:3-9

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. ⁵Through faith you are being protected by God's power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time.

⁶Because of this you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials ⁷so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet by believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Filled with Joy

I.

I think it's good and right to call attention to Peter's invocation of peace to all the readers of his letter, including you and me, because there is so often a lack of peace.

Consider today's readings. The First Reading is part of Peter's Pentecost sermon to a crowd of people. They didn't know anything about Jesus. Certainly they didn't know him as their Savior. Peter made an accusation in that sermon. Speaking about Jesus, he said: "This man, who was handed over by God's set plan and foreknowledge, you killed by having lawless men nail him to a cross" (Acts 2:23, EHV). That doesn't sound very gentle, does it? Peter was preaching the law to them to show these people that their sins were there, whether they knew it or not, and sin robbed them of peace. Peter didn't leave them without hope, however. He also pointed them in the only direction that could bring real peace. "This Jesus is the one God has raised up" (Acts 2:32, EHV).

Three times in today's Gospel Jesus announces: "Peace be with you!" (John 20:19, EHV). Even after the resurrection Jesus' followers were lacking in peace. Why? By the time they were meeting behind locked doors in the evening on Easter Day, several people had already seen Jesus alive. The women had gone to the tomb, spoken with the angel, and then had seen Jesus. Peter and John had gone to see the empty tomb for themselves. Some had talked to Jesus on the road to Emmaus; when they realized it was the risen Lord, they went back to Jerusalem and found the disciples meeting behind locked doors. "They were saying, 'The Lord really has been raised! He has appeared to Simon'" (Luke 24:34, EHV). Peter apparently had seen Jesus privately, though we don't know the details. All those interactions brought moments of unmitigated joy.

Yet it seems they had descended back into a lack of peace. Despite his private meeting,

Peter might have had a sense of shame. He had been so bold during Jesus' last Passover dinner, but his behavior had come up so far short. None of them had shown much support for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he was praying, or when he was arrested. Guilt was fresh in their memories. Then there was the guilt over the Easter Vigil. None of them had believed him when he had told them he would rise again. No one was waiting near the tomb for him to fulfill his promises. The women came to finish a burial, not thinking they would greet their risen Lord.

Then there were their thoughts about the future. Those brought no peace, either. How would they be treated by the Jews? Would there be a physical price to pay for having followed Jesus?

On top of it all was the elephant in the room robbing them of peace. They still had doubt. Doubt about what it all meant and even doubts about their salvation. Before Easter evening *all* of them had their doubts. It wasn't just Thomas, who didn't get to see him that night and demanded more proof.

II.

By the time Peter wrote the letter from which our sermon text is taken, years had gone by. Peter had heard Jesus' invocation "peace be with you" both individually and in a group several times. He had come to understand much more fully how all the details fit together of Jesus life, death, resurrection, and ascension. It is because he understood that Peter gave the invocation of peace we began with moments ago.

"Now for a little while...you have been grieved by various kinds of trials" (1 Peter 1:6, EHV). Various kinds of trials disturb the peace and rob a person of peace. There are so many and they are so varied. Life is full of trials. Loss of loved ones. Interpersonal problems. Family problems. Societal problems. Health problems. Financial problems. To list all the possible trials would take more time than we have. Mine are different than yours. Everyone has them. As Peter says, each of us is grieved by various kinds of trials.

The root cause of all the various kinds of trials can be traced back to sin. After the first sin, God announced the consequences. Working and earning a living was no longer pure joy, but had hardships associated with it. Other problems were added to the world: diseases and pain and sorrow and tears. Sin also brought the consequence of death: everyone has to face death some day.

III.

The biggest consequence for sin is that God says he cannot and will not tolerate sin. Sin must be punished. That means our sin separates us from God. The Apostle Paul wrote: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23, EHV). Your sins earned something; my sins earned something. Sin earned us disfavor with God—separation from God. There was no way we could escape the wages we had earned.

But God didn't want us to be saddled with the horrible and destructive wages we had earned. He made a plan to remove those wages. The Lenten season puts the spotlight on God's plan to deal with sin. We watched Jesus take his final steps to the cross to receive the wages of sin so that we wouldn't have to.

Hanging on the cross on Good Friday, Jesus said: "It is finished." God laid on Jesus the punishment for every sin in the world. He laid on Jesus the wages of sin. Jesus paid it all.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3-4, EHV). When Jesus died on the cross, our sins died with him. God has already punished

him for every single one of them. When Jesus rose from the dead, it signaled God the Father's acceptance of his payment for sins.

Jesus received our wages for sin. In place of those, in his resurrection, Jesus gave us a fabulous inheritance. It is undying, undefiled, and unfading. In other words, it will not end, it cannot be stained or messed up in any way, and it will not fade or diminish with the passage of time.

That's why Peter could give his invocation: "Grace and peace be multiplied to you." He already knew he was going to talk about your sure inheritance which brings you peace with God.

"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet by believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory" (1 Peter 1:8, EHV). Thomas insisted that he needed to *see* Jesus in the flesh and *touch* the wounds Jesus received from the nails and the spear. As hardheaded as some of those followers of Jesus were, the eyewitness accounts of what they saw and touched is the message the Holy Spirit uses to work in us faith—faith that believes what the Lord Jesus has done for each one of us and is filled with inexpressible joy.

IV.

"Because of this you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials ⁷so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:6-7, EHV).

The root cause of all the challenges in life and the trials in life are things each of us have to endure, yet the Bible promises that God can and does use even those things for our benefit. Peter compares your faith to gold and the trials of life to fire. When fire is applied to gold, the gold itself will melt, but it isn't consumed. Impurities are burned off, leaving nothing but pure gold behind.

The burdens of life can seem crushing. Sorrow and grief can feel overwhelming. Remember that crushing, overwhelming trials are "for a little while." Today might seem long. Then it stretches into tomorrow and next week and next year. But in the context of eternity, it's "a little while."

Your faith, on the other hand, is for more than "a little while." The proven character of your faith will "be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

"Through faith you are being protected by God's power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time" (1 Peter 1:5, EHV). Through all those trials and challenges, the God-given gift of faith protects you. God's power is limitless. It is God's power that gave Jesus the ability to pay for the sins of the whole world. God's power raised Jesus from the dead. God's power also fills you with the desire to serve God alone and to love God alone.

"By believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter 1:8-9, EHV).

Faith puts your life in context. Faith defines you. Your joy in the Lord Jesus for the salvation he has won for you gives you stability through good times and bad, knowing that you already have the salvation of your soul, and the eternity with Jesus that comes with it.

Death's power is gone. Satan's power is gone. As one of Christ's redeemed, you are filled with joy. Amen.