

1 Peter 1:22-2:3

²²Since you have purified your souls by obeying the truth, resulting in sincere brotherly love, love one another constantly from a pure heart. ²³For you have been born again, not from perishable seed but from imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

²⁴For:

All flesh is like grass,
and all its glory is like a flower of the field.

The grass withers,
and the flower falls,

²⁵but the word of the Lord endures forever.

And this is the word that was preached to you.

^{2:1}Therefore rid yourselves of all evil, all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all slander. ²Like newborn babies, crave the pure milk of the word so that by it you may grow up with the result being salvation. ³Certainly you have tasted that the Lord is good!

Lost and Found

I.

In today's Gospel Jesus talked about the two people who went up to the temple to pray. If you had seen the Pharisee that morning, you would have thought: "Now *there's* a man who takes his faith seriously." Tithes were an obligation for the Jews; he fully met that obligation. God's Law in Leviticus commanded only one fast per year; by Jesus' day, the religious leaders had expanded it to twice a week. This man rigidly adhered to that twice-a-week fast. As for praying, he made sure to pray loudly and in a place where everyone could hear him praying. Every box of godliness was checked by this Pharisee.

The other of the two men was a tax collector. He could only look down at his feet in shame. He could only choke out: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13, EHV).

Jesus' parable confronted his listeners—and us—with an uncomfortable question: Which person actually *had* something? Which one possessed the thing the other one was only performing? After presenting the attitude of the tax collector, Jesus said plainly: "I tell you, this man went home justified rather than the other" (Luke 18:14, EHV). The Pharisee had religion. He didn't have the Word doing anything to him.

That's not just a problem of Jesus' day. It had happened to God's Chosen nation on a national scale, and almost nobody noticed. The First Reading today told us about it. At the time young Josiah took the throne, the temple was still standing. The priests were still there. The nation, technically, still had a religion.

But somewhere along the line—no one could exactly say when—the actual Book of the Law had been lost. It lay forgotten in some storeroom under years of neglect. The *appearance* of worship had gone on without it. Josiah wanted to restore the temple. "When they brought out the silver that had been brought into the House of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD that had been received from the hand of Moses" (2 Chronicles 34:14, EHV). Think about that. God's own temple, with priests being commissioned to serve God, "doing church," but God's Word itself was missing. Years went by without anyone realizing God's Word was gone.

There is a question, both in today's Old Testament reading and the Gospel for today: "Could this happen to you?" Could you keep coming, keep checking the boxes, and

somewhere along the way lose the thing that's supposed to be alive in you? Could it happen that you wouldn't even notice it was gone?

II.

Hilkiah the priest is the one who found the Book of the Law, buried in the temple, forgotten, dusty. He gave it to Shaphan. Shaphan read it to King Josiah. "When the king heard the words of the law, he tore his clothing" (2 Chronicles 34:19, EHV). King Josiah had been trying to clean up the religious rot, but when he heard the Book of the Law in its entirety, he could not be calm. It was clear that the nation had drifted far from what God's Word actually told them. He tore his robes. He didn't just *feel* bad about it, he gathered the whole nation to listen to the Word. He led the people to reaffirm the covenant God had made with his people in that Book. One rediscovered scroll turned an entire kingdom around.

The Word, once it's heard again, doesn't just inform you. It remakes you.

Peter wants us to see that this is even deeper than Josiah's story. The Word was never actually the thing that was lost. The people were. We were. The Word doesn't need finding the way we sometimes might think. Peter says: "You have been born again, not from perishable seed but from imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23, EHV). The Word doesn't actually wait around in a storeroom hoping someone eventually will stumble into it. It endures. Peter quotes Isaiah: "The grass withers, and the flower falls, ²⁵but the word of the Lord endures forever" (1 Peter 1:24-25, EHV, quoting Isaiah 40:6-8). Long after Isaiah was in the grave, long after Josiah's kingdom fell, long after you and I are gone from this earth, God's Word still stands.

Psalm 1 gives contrasting attitudes: "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the advice of the wicked... ²His delight is in the teaching of the LORD, and on his teaching he meditates day and night... ⁴Not so the wicked! No, they are like the chaff which the wind blows away" (Psalm 1:1-2, 4, EHV). How often does your Bible sit closed? How often do you see the Word of God as an "obligation" instead of a delight? Sadly, all too often we look more like the wicked than the blessed, who delight in the teaching of the Lord.

III.

That's the kind of diagnosis Josiah tore his robes over. His repentance was real and good. But even the best king of Judah couldn't undo generations of neglect by the sheer force of his grief. Something else had to happen.

Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. Never once did Jesus let the Word gather dust. At age 12 he was in his Father's house, absorbed in God's Word (Luke 2:49). In the wilderness, when Satan came at him with every temptation, Jesus answered with a Bible passage (Mt 4:4, 7, 10). He never drifted from the Word a single day of his life. Nothing about what Jesus did was easy, but he devoted himself to the Father's Word...and never failed.

He lived that never-drifting life for you, because you couldn't. You and I are the chaff the wind could have, *should* have—driven away. That's what a life of forgotten, neglected, convenient only when it's convenient, devotion to God actually deserves.

Instead of driving you and me away, God drove his own Son away from himself. On the cross, God turned his face away from the Son so that he would never have to turn his face away from you. Jesus was forsaken—cut off—so that the Word that condemns chaff would instead call you a tree planted by streams of water.

That's why Peter can say: "You have purified your souls by obeying the truth" (1 Peter 1:22, EHV). Not because you finally found your way back to God, the way Josiah and his team found a lost Book. No, Peter says: "You have been born again, not from perishable

seed but from imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 1:23, EHV). You were lost, but Christ found you—through his Word, by his blood, before you ever tore a robe or felt a moment of guilt over a closed Bible. God loved you enough to open his Book to you.

IV.

So, “Like newborn babies, crave the pure milk of the word” (1 Peter 2:2, EHV). Think about a newborn. No one has to convince a hungry infant to want the bottle. Take it away and watch what happens: red-faced, furious, screaming to have it back. They want it because they need it; without it, they die. That’s not a controlled, disciplined kind of craving. It’s desperate.

That’s the craving Peter is describing. Not “I should probably read my Bible today,” but “I need this, or I’m not going to make it.”

“Therefore rid yourselves of all evil, all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all slander” (1 Peter 2:1, EHV). Don’t treat the Word of God as optional. Commit yourself to worship and Bible study. Don’t think that your confirmation classes have given you everything you need for a lifetime of Christianity. Set a daily rhythm for reading the Word—even 5 minutes, even when it doesn’t feel urgent. Have a regular schedule of devotions and prayer.

The Book was found once, buried in a temple nobody thought to search. You don’t have to go looking for it that way. It already found you. Nailed to a cross, risen from a grave, alive and enduring in the pages open in front of you right now. You were lost. In Christ, through his Word, you have been found. That Word will keep you until the day you see him face to face. Amen.