

## Welcome and Announcements – May 3, 2020

**Prelude:** *I Greet Thee Who My Sure Redeemer Art*

*“I greet Thee who my sure Redeemer art, my only Trust and Savior of my heart.”*

**Opening Prayer:** Following Psalm 16 (Every week in Eastertide – through May 24)

*Song of Trust and Security in God*

<sup>1</sup> Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

<sup>2</sup> I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord;  
I have no good apart from you.”

<sup>3</sup> As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble,  
in whom is all my delight.

<sup>4</sup> Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;  
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out  
or take their names upon my lips.

<sup>5</sup> The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;  
you hold my lot.

<sup>6</sup> The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
I have a goodly heritage.

<sup>7</sup> I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;  
in the night also my heart instructs me.

<sup>8</sup> I keep the LORD always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;  
my body also rests secure.

<sup>10</sup> For you do not give me up to Sheol,  
or let your faithful one see the Pit.

<sup>11</sup> You show me the path of life.  
In your presence there is fullness of joy;  
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

**Opening Hymn: *In Christ There Is No East Or West***

1. In Christ there is no east or west,  
In Him no south or north;  
But one great fellowship of love  
Throughout the whole wide earth.

2. In Christ shall true hearts everywhere  
There high communion find;  
His service is the golden cord  
Close binding humankind.

3. Join hands, disciples of the faith  
Whate'er your race may be.  
All children of the living God  
Are surely kin to me.

4. In Christ now meet both east and west,  
In Him meet south and north;  
All Christly souls are one in Him  
Throughout the whole wide earth.

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Scripture: John 10: 10; 1 Peter 3:1-22**

**John 10:10**

<sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

**1 Peter 3 :1-22**

***Wives and Husbands***

*3 Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, <sup>2</sup> when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. <sup>3</sup> Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; <sup>4</sup> rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. <sup>5</sup> It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by*

accepting the authority of their husbands. <sup>6</sup> Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

<sup>7</sup> Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.

### ***Suffering for Doing Right***

<sup>8</sup> Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. <sup>9</sup> Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. <sup>10</sup> For

*“Those who desire life  
and desire to see good days,  
let them keep their tongues from evil  
and their lips from speaking deceit;*

*<sup>11</sup> let them turn away from evil and do good;  
let them seek peace and pursue it.*

*<sup>12</sup> For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,  
and his ears are open to their prayer.*

*But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

<sup>13</sup> Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, <sup>15</sup> but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; <sup>16</sup> yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil. <sup>18</sup> For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup> in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup> who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. <sup>21</sup> And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

## **Sermon: Tender Hearts, Humble Minds (God and Relationships)**

Each week in Eastertide will be a reflection on “The Path of Life” for Christians going through 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter. Psalm 16 will be our guiding prayer each week too.

April 19: Show Me the Path of Life, 1 Peter 1, Psalm 16

April 26: Honor Everyone. Fear God. Honor the Emperor (God and Governments), 1 Peter 2

*May 3: Tender Hearts; Humble Minds (God and Relationships), 1 Peter 3, John 10:10b*

May 10: Speaking the Very Words of God (God and Suffering), 1 Peter 4; John 14:6

May 17: Tend the Flock in Your Charge (God and the Church) 1 Peter 5; John 14:15

May 24: Waterless Springs and Mist in the Storm (God and False Prophets) 2 Peter 1&2

## **Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper**

### **Invitation to the Table**

### **Prayer of Great Thanksgiving and the Lord’s Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

### **Words of Institution**

**Communion Meditation:** *Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts*

*“O Jesus with us every stay, make all our moments calm and bright; O chase the night of sin away, shed o’er the world Thy holy light.”*

### **Prayer after Communion**

### **Sending us out to be God's Word in the World:**

Every hand that we don't shake must become a phone call that we place. Every embrace that we avoid must become a verbal expression of warmth and concern. Every inch and every foot that we physically place between ourselves and another, must become a thought as to how we might be of help to that other, should that need arise. –*Rabbi Yosef Kanevsky of Los Angeles*

### **Closing Hymn: *Blest Be the Tie That Binds***

1. Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love:  
The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.

2. From sorrow, toil, and pain, and sin we shall be free.  
And perfect love and friendship reign through all eternity.

### **A Blessing of Eastertide**

**Response:** *Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above* (v. 3)

*The Lord is never far away*

*But through all grief distressing,*

*An ever present help and stay,*

*Our peace, and joy, and blessing;*

*As with a mother's tender hand,*

*God gently leads the chosen band:*

*To God all praise and glory!*

**Postlude:** – *Postlude in C* by Caleb Simper, arr. Michael Ryan. Used by permission

## **Tender Hearts; Humble Minds**

*“Religion and various models of human development seem to suggest there are two major tasks for each human life. The first task is to build a strong “container” or identity; the second is to find the contents that the container was meant to hold. The first task we take for granted as the very purpose of life. This does not mean we do it well, but because we’re so focused on it, we may not even attempt the second task.” -- Richard Rohr*

My friends...Relationships are hard.

Reading the Bible doesn't make them any easier.

Because the formation of our identities in relationship with other people is so integral to the task of “being human” it fits quite well into Richard Rohr’s understanding of the tasks of human life, so that’s the lens through which I plan to look at 1 Peter, chapter 3.

Again...

The first task = build a strong container/identity

The second task = find the contents that container was meant to hold

Religion loves itself some containers.

Religion often is all about the perpetuation of containers – you know, like denominations, and branches split off from those denominations. We happily choose to box ourselves in with like-minded Facebook groups, and niche musical styles.

We try to sell these boxes to our friends. We could easily be the next container store. You need to have this, look like this, be like this to be my friend.

As individuals we can find a box to fit any identity into its rightful social structure. We love making boxes for gender roles, economic and racial stereotypes, and most of all we love the boxes labeled: “Christian values.”

And when a person’s identity gets more “outside the box” than makes us comfortable, we usually decide that they need a new container rather than to take a peek inside and see what exactly is in the box itself. Inside organized religion, this is how we formulate the institutions that fit us, and don’t include those “other” people.

I think that’s why religion seems to be getting smaller and smaller.

We have containerized it!

The writer of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter couldn't keep himself from talking about the containers of his own time.

Why?

Why does he talk about honor and obedience, authority and obligation?

Why does he insist on making such cringeworthy statements about slaves submitting to their masters and likewise wives submitting to their husbands?

Most of the time, people presume that the writer was a man of his own time, and that his statements were a reflection of values that reflected his commitment to the Christian life, at least then. Makes sense. Therefore, you can use that information as either an affirmation of biblical truth if you share those values, or as a dismissal of that information as historically bound if you choose to understand that the concept of marriage has changed repeatedly over the last 2000 years.

But what if something else is going on here? What if this letter is asking them to "look like" they are following the cultural rules, but freeing them to live apart from them? Biblical historians suggest that this letter was written during a time when Christians were actually being persecuted for their way of life.

It may help us to think about what were they accused of doing that was so completely different. They were claiming that Jesus was Lord – something the Emperor certainly didn't like. They were upending economic norms, sharing everything in common and removing social hierarchies within their communities. So, there was a significant line being blurred between slaves and their masters. Women were also taking leadership roles in these fledgling communities. They were donating money and voice to the cause – which caused ripples of commotion among the men who felt this new religion would disrupt their households – because it was disrupting their households.

How could the writer of this letter send this community a message to keep following the path of life as Jesus taught AND keep his community safe from those who would seek to destroy it? Perhaps it's by letting the contents be far more important than the containers.

Yes, this letter affirms some tropes about wives and husbands that have seemed to be locked into gender norms for a ridiculously long time. Wives are to be pure, and quiet, and obedient. They are to be beautiful, but modest about their beauty. Husbands are to be strong and provide for their families, honoring the wife, saying their prayers. These are such familiar containers to us. Whether we love them or hate them – we most certainly know their power – particularly in times of trouble. When there's reason to be suspect of a community and call them out as "different" - gender norms get locked down alongside of other expected behaviors. Women will be told to act like women and men like men. Stepping outside those categories – in either direction – might earn you some serious disfavor in one's larger context.

But each time that this letter steps into those container making speeches, something quite different follows – and if you'll notice carefully – it happens a lot in the letters of the New Testament. What follows is almost always a speech about content that is meant to be levels above in importance to those containers.

Jesus teaches those changes in this formulaic way – you have heard it said, but I say...

This letter talks about wives and husbands and their roles together in a more generous way than might have been happening elsewhere, and then says, “*All of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.*” The contents are more important than the containers. What you do with and who you are in your life is more important than any label that can be placed on you. This is a call to *mutual forbearance* – a popular idea in Presbyterian-land. It means that the soundness of faith is not shaken by a wide diversity of interpretations. You can be Christian and be wives, husbands, sons, daughters, partners, lovers, friends, or neighbors in a whole bunch of different kinds of ways, if you can only agree to the contents of your lives together. The contents of Christian character therefore, are spelled out and they include: unity of spirit, sympathy, and love for each other. The roles you play, the identities you form, whether you are the “good wife” or the “strong husband” doesn’t matter one bit. What matters is that in all relationships you come into and engage the community of believers with tender hearts and humble minds.

This is about stopping the cycles of abuse and evil that frequently rear up in unequal relationships. If there’s inequality built into a relationship – a step out of line usually means that retaliation will follow. I think this letter speaks to a radical reorientation of the kind of hierarchical relationships that have yet to go away. And the reason they are still here and still so powerful and predominant goes right back to Richard Rohr’s observation about the tasks of life. We need to deeply know our identity before we can have enough courage to notice what might be dwelling inside that identity that needs way more room than we’ve been allowing.

We often read the Bible thinking it is a book that was written to help us preserve the status quo. It can be read that way. It talks about the importance of tradition and in it - roles and responsibilities are given serious consideration. And yet, in the unfolding story of our spiritual journey, biblical or experiential, those who are ready to encounter God often break the rules, bypass the stereotypes, and even if it’s with a tremor in their voice, they confront institutional rot at its core.

We are reformed and always reforming. That’s what our theology teaches. Institutions and identities, roles and rituals are the product of what has come before by way of tradition, and yet they are always in the process of receiving newer, bigger ideas and understandings that will reform them. The Bible tells that story consistently if you read it closely. That’s a good thing. Times change, and people can too. But I have also noticed that whether our containers are in the process of being torn down or built up God can always be found on the side of love, joy, freedom and compassion. The contents are always the same. Where tender hearts and humble minds are open – God is always there – calling us to see what’s new. The path of life is joy. There may be fear in stepping into that joy, but our desires and dreams can grow to fit the kind of God who cannot be contained by any “too small to fit” identity – the label “Christian God” included.

Again, relationships are hard.

They are way too complex to fit into sentences that say wives, do this; husbands, do that.

The hard things in life don’t fit neatly into boxes.

The path of life is about joy and love.

When we get to that second task of life and want to live by the contents not the container,

We will be changed.

The transformation may be difficult.

Our containers get too small for us to hold ourselves in.

Friends, God can hold it all.

But as Psalm 34 goes on to say – past the part that is quoted in verses 10-12 about the reversals of evil and the prayerfulness of the righteous – God is always close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in Spirit.

Certainly, even in our own time, there will be good and modest wives.

Even now, there will be strong, providing husbands.

They will find God in the roles they have set for their lives.

Or maybe they won't. And the loss of that identity will be painful.

And then there will be the rest of us who live in messy relationships of all the kinds.

The mess spills out.

We don't fit in.

Maybe marriage and family never looked “normal” in our lives.

Maybe we intentionally thumbed our noses at the system that told us how we ought to be.

Maybe biblical relationships are just human relationships,

and all the best ones have always been about love.

Freedom reaches out to us in the form of the wise and tender ones, the humble kind ones –

Who remind us of God's love, and comfort us in being as large,

and as wild and amazing as we can be.

Jesus got himself executed because he talked about the freedom to love –

Not just in marriage and family relationships,

But deeply in friendships,

And by trusting neighbors,

And impossibly as he stretched that love to even include our enemies.

It broke the rules and shattered the containers to let love and joy, freedom and compassion spill all over us.

That's the path of life I want to be on. Amen.

