



Daily Faith Practices

The Third Sunday of Easter (A) – 1 Peter 1:17-23

Focus: *Living in Exile*

word of life

“If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile.” (1 Peter 1:17 NRSV)

Read 1 Peter 1:17-23

The First Letter of Peter begins as follows, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the exiles of the Dispersion...” (See 1 Peter 1:1 NRSV) Biblical scholars tend to agree that the recipients of this letter were not *exiled* Christians living away from their homeland, but those who were facing hardships and persecution. This letter serves as a timely reminder for all Christians to expect challenges and to not get too settled in this world.

1. *What do you know about the persecutions of Christians in the first century?*
2. *In what ways might the early Christians have felt like they were living in exile?*

The use of the word *exile* is repeated again in 1 Peter 1:17. It is a strong image which evokes memories of the past, when the Jews were taken from the Promised Land to Babylon. They were forced to leave Jerusalem, the temple, and their way of life. Despite the prophets forewarning them about such a possibility, they were unprepared for the disruption of their lives and the move to a foreign land. How could God allow such horrible things to happen to God’s own chosen people?

The Jews who experienced the exile in Babylon were unable to return to their homeland. And yet during the years away, there were some positive outcomes. They repented from their arrogant attitudes, re-committed to the teachings of God, and made plans to rebuild the temple. They found ways to worship God in a foreign land and to keep the law. The adversity of exile fueled faithfulness for many.

3. *What would it be like to live in exile, unable to visit your homeland?*
4. *How might people who live in exile feel abandoned from God?*

It is an interesting proposal—that Christians are living in exile. In other words, Christians are not to get too comfortable on this earth. Instead Christians are to “live in reverent fear.” (1 Peter 1:17 NRSV) *Fear* in this context does not mean to be scared or afraid, but instead to *have awe*. The adjective *reverent* only underscores the noun *awe*. Christians are to live with an attitude of awe upon awe. The gift of salvation has been extended to us not because someone contributed gold or silver, but because Jesus gave his precious blood.

“You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.” (1 Peter 1:18 NRSV) That makes all the difference. Since Christ suffered and gave his life, we too can endure hardship and suffering.

In fact, during times of hardship and suffering, there can be a joy deep in us and we can love with a genuine mutual love. Simply put, “Love one another deeply from the heart.” (1 Peter 1:22 NRSV) That is a love not just for the easy times of our lives—but also during difficulty.

5. *How can people in exile be expected to extend a genuine mutual love to one another?*
6. *Is it practical to expect Christians to love one another deeply from the heart?*

Word among us

When the weather forecasters issued severe warnings about the possible impact of Hurricane Katrina on Greater New Orleans, the familiar routine of packing favorite belongings, pets, and loved ones began. People moved in with family members and friends who lived away from danger of the hurricane. Hotels away from the pending storm were overflowing. But instead of being gone from their homes for a few days as is typical after a hurricane, the exodus became more of an exile. The breach of the levees in New Orleans destroyed long-standing homes and neighborhoods. There was no familiar ground or street signs to welcome residents home. Some waited months to return; some never came back.

1. *What images do you remember from Hurricane Katrina?*
2. *What is the difference between an exodus and an exile?*

The first weeks and months following Hurricane Katrina were chaos as people tried to make contact with loved ones. Search and rescue teams were the only ones allowed in certain areas of the city. The infrastructure of their communities was ripped to shreds to such an extent that it was not safe for people to return. Their safety could not be assured by law enforcement. Those who evacuated New Orleans because of Hurricane Katrina began to feel like they were living in exile; they were not allowed to return to their homeland.

People wondered whether they should return to rebuild their lives or move to a new area of the country. Some chose the word *exile* to describe their experience. Exile—a people living in a strange land not of their own choice.

3. *What are other examples of when people in the USA have experienced living in exile?*
4. *What about the experience of living in exile can be used to describe the Christian life?*

The writer of First Peter understands the life of a Christian to be a time of exile. This raises the question whether the world is to be understood as a place to enjoy or a place where we should not expect comfort. Christian history shows a wide spectrum of responses.

5. *How comfortable are we to be in this world?*
6. *When might our comfort level with the pleasures of this world not be compatible with Christian values?*
7. *Does the word “exile” describe your understanding of the Christian life? Explain your answer.*

faith practice in daily life

Live among God’s faithful people

Martin Luther wrote, “At great cost [Jesus] has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil—not with silver or gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death.” (The Small Catechism, Augsburg Publishing House)

8. *What is the cost of Jesus to save and redeem us? So what does that mean for us?*
9. *How does that sacrifice set Christians apart—in exile?*

Prayer

When we experience ourselves exiled from this world and its values draw us near you, O God. Amen

last word

This week watch for times when you feel like an exile because of your Christian faith.

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Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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