

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Adult Bible Class
2 Peter 1:1-15
January 17, 2021

When we are looking for a Bible passage to help us through a difficult time, or when we think of passages that are easy to remember, it is unlikely that something from 2 Peter will come to mind. Unlike 1 Peter, the shorter, second letter of Peter to the early church is not well known and is not often studied. Yet, despite the fact it is often overlooked, 2 Peter, in its 3 short chapters, provides a wealth of resources to help us in our times. In a world where civil discourse has been replaced by anger and insult, we are called to lives of knowledge and virtue (1:1-15). In a world abounding with conspiracy theories, we are called back to the sure Word of God (1:16-21). In a world of fake news and false teaching we are refocused again upon Christ, and his promise of a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness (3:13). Over the next 5 weeks we will dig into this little book that we might be strengthened for life in our time and made ready for the world to come.

Some Background

- We are not the first ones to overlook this book. 2 Peter is not known to be quoted by any Church Father until somewhere in the early 200's.
- The authorship of the book has been questioned from early on. The style of writing is quite different from 1 Peter.
- 2 Peter 2 and the book of Jude are very closely related.
- Despite the issues with the book, conservative scholars of various traditions, affirm that it was most likely written by Peter, late in his life. Peter died in Rome in 65 AD and likely wrote this letter to the churches he had served in Asia Minor. The letter itself testifies to its authenticity: Peter was an eyewitness to the transfiguration (1:16-21), had a close relationship with Paul (3:15) and talks candidly about his own impending death (1:15).

Main Message of the Book

As is typical in ancient writings Peter does not come right out and state the main issue he is addressing in the letter. Instead, it comes very near the end of the letter in a rhetorical question.

“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be? You ought to live lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God ...”

2 Peter 3:11–12

At each step in the letter, Peter is guiding us toward the goal of properly awaiting the time of Christ's return.

Opening verses - 2 Peter 2:1-2

Like most New Testament letters, 2 Peter opens with a greeting from the author to the readers. A couple things stand out in Peter's opening sentences:

- *"Simeon Peter"* (ESV translation) this is the only place in the New Testament where this name is used. It is probably the more accurate name for the apostle as Simeon was one of the 12 sons of Jacob and a father of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Peter is the Greek name given by Jesus himself (Matthew 16:18) when Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
- *"a faith of equal standing"* (ESV) – Even though Peter is a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, this does not give him or any church leader a superior standing before God. All believers are saved by grace through faith and placed on a level footing with each other, because faith is a gift created in us by the Holy Spirit.

The Gifts of God for Life and Godliness - 1 Peter 1:3-11

In a 2018 article on the state of civil discourse in North America, Timothy Connor, a law professor in Tennessee, quotes an old courtroom adage, "If the facts are against you, argue the law. If the law is against you, argue the facts. If the law and the facts are against you, pound the table and yell." We live in a time where there is lots of yelling and lots of people pounding the table, demanding their way is right.

The Christian is however, called to a different way of living. Peter tells his readers that because God's power has come upon us, we are called to God's glory and excellence; our faith is supplemented with virtue. In this way we move beyond the nearsightedness of the world and into the fullness of our calling.

Here are some of the key teachings in this next section of the letter:

- We have received from God, by virtue of his "divine power," all things that pertain to life and godliness.

Luther writes – "Here Peter begins to write about the kind of blessings we have received from God through faith, namely, that—since we have learned to know God through faith—divine power has been granted to us. But what kind of power? It is the kind of power that pertains to life and godliness. That is, when we believe, we receive so much that God gives us His power of every kind, which dwells with and in us in such a way that what we say and do is not said or done by us but is said and done by God Himself. God is strong, powerful, and almighty in us even though we suffer, die, and are weak before the world. Accordingly, we have no power or ability if we do not have this divine power.

But St. Peter does not want this divine power in us to be understood in such a way that we also have the ability to create heaven and earth and should work miracles, as God does. For how would this help us? No, we have divine power with us to the degree that it is useful and necessary for us. Therefore the apostle adds the words "that pertain to life and godliness." That

is, we have the kind of divine power with which we are abundantly blessed to do good and to live eternally.”

- We partake of the “divine nature.” This is a unique expression in the New Testament.

Again Luther – “But what is the divine nature? It is eternal truth, righteousness, wisdom, everlasting life, peace, joy, happiness, and whatever can be called good. Now he who becomes a partaker of the divine nature receives all this, so that he lives eternally and has everlasting peace, joy, and happiness, and is pure, clean, righteous, and almighty against the devil, sin, and death. Therefore, this is what Peter wants to say: Just as God cannot be deprived of being eternal life and eternal truth, so you cannot be deprived of this. If anything is done to you, it must be done to God; for he who wants to oppress a Christian must oppress God.”

John 14:16–17 – “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

1 John 1:3 – “indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

When we come into this world, we are inheritors of the DNA of our parents. As we live that inheritance plays itself out in our lives. Often, we are led to a sense that we cannot change. “It’s in our genes,” we say and carry on in the old ways. Peter reminds us here that through faith – through our baptism into Christ – we also have God’s DNA in us. The Holy Spirit has entered our bodies and lives in us, giving us power to live new lives. His power has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

- Our communion in the divine nature shows itself in our lives. We supplement or add to our faith virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. (1:5-8). The Greek word behind supplement or add to is a word for generous investing as a patron would do for a theatre or musical. This list is like Paul’s list of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22 and culminates in the greatest gift – love (1 Corinthians 13:13). These are the things in which we continue to grow in throughout our Christian life. In 1 Peter 2:2 he urges us to drink the pure spiritual milk that we may grow up into our salvation.
- “If you practice these qualities you will never fall” for we are confirming our call as God’s children. God’s all is confirmed when it does not remain an idea, or something learned from the catechism but is allowed to do its proper work and produce a life that is worthy of the calling. (1:10) This growth happens gradually. If you hammer an acorn on a sidewalk the acorn will break. If the acorn is planted, over time it can utterly destroy the sidewalk.

Luther – “Therefore with the battle of faith God first led, drove, and disciplined Christendom this way in shame, death, and bloodshed, in order that it might become truly strong and powerful. The more it was oppressed, the more it flourished. Now St. Peter means that one should not let faith rest and lie still, for it is so constituted that through application and practice it becomes stronger and stronger until it is sure of the call and election and cannot be wanting.”

- As Peter’s own death approaches, he knows his hearers must constantly be reminded of these things, so they can remember them after his death. Their response to his martyrdom is not to

be rebellion against Rome but continued display of the fruits of faith in their lives. He wants them to learn the lesson he has learned. Over time Peter went from being the brash, immature disciple to being a leader in the church. He went from living off of impulses to displaying the gifts of the Spirit to live in confident faith even in the face of his death for the sake of Christ.

Lord God, heavenly Father, You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to give life to the world. Make us hearers of Your Word that we may share in His divine life, be partakers of all its gifts, and receive the fullness of that life in the heavenly places; through Your Son, Jesus Christ.