

Today we continue in our reading of the letter in the Bible we know as 1st Peter. This is the 2nd week in our 6 part series. Last week we learned that 1st Peter is written to a group of Christians who are spread throughout several churches in Asia Minor. These Christians are experiencing some intimidation from people who knew them before they became Christians.

These old friends and acquaintances are trying to influence these Christians to go back to their old lifestyles. In last week's reading, Peter described these Christians as exiles or strangers because they were living a lifestyle that was different than the people around them. If being here this morning makes you different than your friend's activities today then you can relate to Peter's audience.

This morning we are going to read the remainder of the first chapter of 1st Peter. Read 1st Peter 1:10-25

Brandon Harris tells the story of the entrance to the college he attended in Pennsylvania. Lincoln University. Harris says at the entrance to the college was a church. He says he had driven by the church a million times so it seemed. It was a squat brick building, the bricks falling off the building, the shingles sliding off the roof, and the rickety stairs didn't seem too safe. The church was surrounded by headstones of saints long gone. Who they were, he didn't know.

This church was odd; it seemed out of place to sit next to the front entrance of Lincoln University. Lincoln brimming with life and expectations of twenty-year olds, dancing with the vibrancy that hope brings. And there next to this place of hope sat a beleaguered church, filled with memories long past.

It represented, so he thought, the institutional church, falling apart, filled with dusty hymns and creeds. What did it mean to him?

That was until one day the minister of that small little church spoke to one of his religion classes. The minister told the stories of a tiny congregation who in years past heroically secreted away runaway slaves; the minister dared them to imagine the small flock of Methodist ex-slaves, who with Quakers and Presbyterians, started the college.

The minister weaved stories of hope in the past against threats of violence against those who worshipped there. And that pastor dreamed of the day that this little church, membership of one woman, who dared to keep this church alive would grow again. This pastor dreamed of the church brimming with students from the college, of repairing the roof, of changing the world once again.

But how could this pastor dream of hope for his flock again in the face of their dark situation? One old woman. One pastor. And a falling down building. There is no hope in this situation right? How could this pastor have hope in this situation? I think the letter we know as First Peter can answer that question for us.

In this section of First Peter that we read, Peter also harkens back to the past of his hearers. He cautions them about being conformed to their desires of the past that they had in ignorance. In other words, don't be consumed by the way they did things in the past.

Peter tells his hearers that they have been rescued from their past not by perishable things like silver or gold. But he reminds them that they have been rescued by the blood of Christ. By the love and sacrifice of Christ. Perishable things are just that, he says, perishable. But the love and sacrifice of Christ is imperishable. The love and sacrifice of Christ does not disappear.

Think briefly with me about our lives today. How much of our lives today are consumed by focusing on things that are perishable? How many of us are worried about our houses or being able to make the next mortgage payment? How many of us are consumed by our vehicles and what we will drive and if our vehicle will hold out for us?

How many of us are focused on worries about our jobs or the jobs of our spouses? How many of us are consumed with thoughts about our weight or our appearance?

How many of us are consumed by whatever cell phone or tablet we have or desire? How many of us are consumed by whatever clothes we are wearing or want to wear? How many of us are consumed by how much money we have or what we are going to do on our next vacation? How many of us are consumed by how we will spend our money this summer or this week?

Or how about when we think about the church? How many of us are consumed by thoughts about how to maintain an aging building? How many of us are worried that if there is not enough money given then this church will cease to exist one day?

If we think about it, all of these things I just mentioned are perishable. All of these things I just mentioned can disappear and maybe one day will disappear.

Clothes, cell phones, houses, cars, church buildings are all perishable. They can all disappear. All of these perishable items are not where we place our trust. Because Peter would say that if we are focused on the perishable items then we are misunderstanding what we have inherited.

In my office I have some items that are perishable items that are important to me because of the memories I associate with them. I have a milk can from my Dad's old dairy that reminds me of the time he showed me grace after I dumped out an entire tank of milk because I didn't ask a question for clarification. I have some items I brought back from my trip to the holy land. I have some plaques that I received for coaching my kids in sports when they were younger.

These perishable items are important to me and I do not want to depart with them. But after I am gone these items will mean less to the next person. Maybe one of my children wants the milk can but it will not mean nearly the same. And the story of that milk can will eventually be lost upon a future generation. The plaques will one day end up in the dump.

So these items are not what are important. It is the imperishable memories that I attach to these items that are important. Perishable items are just that. They are perishable and one day they will no longer be around or have the same meaning.

But Peter tells his hearers to focus on what is imperishable. And what is imperishable? Peter says the love and sacrifice of God through Christ is imperishable. Peter says that Christ was destined before the foundation of the world and he was revealed at the end of the ages for you and for me.

It is through Christ that we come to trust in God. It is not through the perishable items that we come to trust in God. It is not through our home, or cell phone, or clothes, or even that precious item that has been passed down through your family.

We do not come to trust in God in Christ through a church building or through the items in the church building. All of these perishable items do need proper care and maintenance. But we should never be so focused on the perishable items that we lose sight of what is imperishable.

And what is imperishable is the love of God through Jesus Christ.

Peter says that if we keep our focus on Christ and not on the perishable things then we will respond by showing genuine mutual love for one another. A love which comes from being born anew through Christ.

I don't know if that falling down church with one member and a visionary pastor ever realized the hopes and dreams of that pastor. For all I know it was bulldozed under for a new sports stadium.

But the building is not as important as the dreams of those former members whose stories can inspire a new generation to be Christians of action.

May we also be people who are not overly focused on the perishable things of life. May we be people who are focused on what is not perishable.

And what is not perishable is the love of God through Jesus Christ. AMEN.

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-Harris, Brandon, <http://day1.org/5727>-
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-Given: May 4, 2014 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)