

**THIS SERVICE OF REFLECTION CONTINUES
OUR SERIES ON THE LETTER, 1 PETER**



have offered some notes on this book to offer a very general overview of the letter.

Hymns may be accessed over the internet by clicking on the https links where given.

You are invited to light a candle as we share in this service together

WE COME TO WORSHIP AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

Though we may be physically apart, we ARE one; we are the church of God, a gathered community, brought together in the bonds of peace, assembled today in thought and concern, in spirit, in love and in prayer. We offer up to the Lord, with thankfulness, the night that has now passed, and the day that lies open before us.

We hold a moment of silence as we prepare ourselves to receive God's word.

ACCLAMATION AND OPENING PRAYER

May Christ, risen in great glory, scatter the darkness from our hearts and minds and shine upon us this day and always.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed alleluia!

Welcoming Creator God, we gather today to worship and praise you. We gather each in our own place, recognizing that wherever we are, it is holy ground upon which we stand, for you created it.

Approachable Saviour, we bring our prayers, our sighs, and our worries this day. For our sake, you aligned yourself with humanity, bearing mortal suffering upon the tree of life, that we might be redeemed, and for this, we praise you.

Enlivening Spirit, weaver of life and elation, we open ourselves to you this day. Recreate us as confident disciples, strengthened to not simply endure, but to live well, appreciating fully, the joyful hope that is our salvation, through the resurrection of Christ Jesus. **AMEN**

HYMN – we come to God as we sing or reflect upon the words of this hymn.

STF Music 494- arr. by Chris Rice

<https://youtu.be/NjfToqk5w5g>

**Come, Thou Fount of every blessing
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace
Streams of mercy, never ceasing
Call for songs of loudest praise
Teach me some melodious sonnet
Sung by flaming tongues above
Praise the mount, I'm fixed upon it
Mount of Thy redeeming love**

**Here I raise my Ebenezer *
Here there by Thy great help I've come
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure
Safely to arrive at home
Jesus sought me when a stranger
Wandering from the fold of God
He, to rescue me from danger
Interposed His precious blood**

**Oh, that day when freed from sinning
I shall see Thy lovely face
Clothed then in the blood washed linen
How I'll sing Thy sovereign grace
Come, my Lord, no longer tarry
Take my ransomed soul away
Send Thine angels now to carry
Me to realms of endless day**

Oh, to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be
Let thy goodness like a fetter
Bind my wandering heart to Thee
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it
Prone to leave the God I love
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it
Seal it for Thy courts above

**(Here I raise my Ebenezer, from 1 Samuel 7:12, it reminds God's people how from danger. Ebenezer meaning "stone of help")*

CONFESSION

God of the heights, lift me up this day. I
repent the times I have crawled in the
mire of despair,
God of the heavens, lift me up.

I repent the times when I have been
overwhelmed by the attention of worldly
things,
God of the stars, lift me up.

I repent the times when I have been
unable to see past the clouds of "truths"
that others would have me believe,
God of the sunlight, lift me up.

I repent the times when I have been
dazzled by the false "jewels" of society,
God of the gentle moonlight, lift me up.

I repent the times when I have been led
by the demands of society to misplace my
priorities,
God of the universe, lift me up.

For all these things and more, I repent. I
want my soul to stretch and breathe and
to have my mind opened to your ways,
God of the heights, lift me up this day and
always.. **AMEN**

READING 1 PETER 1 V 13-23

¹³ Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." ¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

COMMENTARY

Going to the post office to open the post box with my father, was always an event, and if there was a letter from my grandmother or another relative in England, it would be immediately taken home, and we would gather round to hear my mother read it out. Often it was an airletter, **crammed** full of news! There was frequently news of new arrivals to the family, marriages, sometimes photos and, sadly the news of deaths too.

These letters kept us in the loop and held us in the narrative of the wider family, but more than that they were full of encouragement as we endured difficult times, and they were jam packed with deep love. To say these letters acted as an anchor in our lives would not be an over statement. Indeed, there are some letters that have been so important to me that I have kept them. One such letter is from my Gran, where she signs off “*sending best love- Gran xxx.*” I treasure the fact that she sent me her BEST love! I will, from time to time, re-read some of these letters, and reacquaint myself with the encouragement and deep love contained within them.

1 Peter is just such a letter! It is full of warmth, love and encouragement for its recipients and was written to Christians who were enduring hardships and persecution. It is probably useful to paint in some of the “political landscape” of the region, evidenced through another historical document, also a letter, written by Pliny the Younger, governor of the region to which 1 Peter is addressed.

Pliny writes to the Emperor Trajan, seeking his advice on how to deal with Christians. The underlying problem is, quite probably, that the Christians, are refusing to worship the pagan gods, and this is almost certainly regarded as incitement to rebellion against roman rule. Pliny says he gives them three chances to revoke their faith; if they refuse the third time, they are punished (possibly by execution).

Pliny gives a very early insight into the Christian community and writes this.....

“They had been accustomed to come together on a fixed day before daylight and to sing responsively a song to Christ as a god. They bound themselves with an oath—not to commit some crime—but, on the contrary, that they would not commit theft, nor robbery, nor adultery, that they would not break faith, nor refuse to return a deposit when asked for it. When they had done these things, their custom was to separate and to assemble again to

partake of a meal, common yet harmless (which is not the characteristic of a nefarious superstition) They stopped doing this after my edict. You, [Trajan] had asked me to prohibit secret societies, so I did. Because you asked this, I considered it all the more necessary to examine, even with the use of torture, two female slaves who were called deaconesses, in order to get to the truth. But I found nothing except a superstition depraved and immoderate. I therefore postponed my examination and had recourse to you for consultation.”

On a lighter note the first thing I thought on reading that letter, was “trust a deacon to be the heart of the problem” but on a serious note it is clear from Pliny’s letter, that life wasn’t easy for the Christians of this region. The letter 1 Peter, was surely to have been received as a warm, hugely encouraging and uplifting text, retained and re-read, providing ongoing strength and hope in the face of adversity, when the human impulse may have been to surrender, and to join the licentious pagan cults for a quieter life!

The people are urged to remain alert for the return of Christ and to live as holy people, shunning the nefarious ways of their world. The sense of expectancy that the early Christians held, is perhaps difficult to get our heads around and I wondered what we miss when we neither cultivate that sense of joyful expectancy and live lives with our “spiritual cupboards” cluttered, filled with the extraneous and trivial belongings that speak into the cults of popularism and misplaced priorities.

The call to holiness, contained within the letter, has taken me back to a book I read many years ago by Alie Stibbe, entitled

“Barefoot at the Kitchen Sink.” In it she seeks to discover where the holy places are to be found for her in a busy life schedule, and one of the narratives she reflected on was Moses, stopping to take off his shoes as he came face to face with God, in the burning bush. There in that moment, Moses acknowledges that he is standing on holy ground. It prompts the author to take off her shoes while she washes up and by and by, she finds that within the mundane, she too comes face to face with the holiness of God. Perhaps that says something to us at this time, as we worship at home.

1 Peter urges the Christians to acknowledge their status as foreigners. Augustine in his work “The City of God” explores the theme that Christians hold their true citizenship in the heavenly city of God, and by default, are always “resident aliens” journeying towards God, living in a foreign land. Sometimes for us, being a Christian in today’s world, can cause us to feel like exiles, but of course for those persecuted for their faith, it really can and does mean exile, imprisonment, torture or death, all for practising their faith or proclaiming the name of Jesus. Undoubtedly, those Christians who endure these great trials, hold on to the same message given in the letter, that they have been redeemed by something more imperishable and more precious than can come from any refiners fire and that they inherit freedom and salvation through Christ’s resurrection, gifted through the living word of God and that nothing can separate them from this.

It was with humility, that I listened to an Anglican ordinand, describing his covert trips to Pakistan to minister to Asia Bibi, a Christian, arrested in 2008, sentenced to death and finally released last year. Her

strong faith and the letters received, encouraged her to not renounce her faith in Christ, but to remain steadfast in great adversity. Perhaps it is here that we should heed the words in this letter to “*love one another deeply, from the heart.*” Why not consider them a prompt to put pen to paper, as you are able, and to offer words of encouragement to another who may be feeling disheartened, lonely or afraid in these tumultuous and uncertain times. As you journey through the coming week, may you be encouraged, lifted up, and refined for God’s purpose, in the furnace of Christ’s holy love.

HYMN

STF 508 <https://youtu.be/0IvXA0yRDwY>

Purify my heart,
let me be as gold
and precious silver.
Purify my heart,
let me be as gold,
pure gold.

*Refiner's fire,
my heart's one desire
is to be holy,
set apart for you, Lord.
I choose to be holy,
set apart for you my master,
ready to do your will.*

Purify my heart,
cleanse me from within
and make me holy.
Purify my heart,
cleanse me from my sin,
deep within.

INTERCESSIONS

We pause to pray for all who feel exiled and fearful

May your resurrection love be with them

We pause to pray for all who are working for the well-being of others, in spite of their own fears

May your resurrection love be with them

We pause to pray for those who suffer for their faith in the darkness of persecution

May your resurrection love be with them

We pause to pray for our own beloved families, our dear friends, and our cherished church family

May your resurrection love be with them

We pause to pray for our various groups in our churches who are unable to meet

May your resurrection love be with them

We pause to pray for teachers and children, in this country and beyond, returning to school, yet not returning to school

May your resurrection love be with them

We pause to pray for ourselves that we may live lives worthy of our calling, in faithfulness and hope

May your resurrection love be with us

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

HYMN

STF 638 <https://youtu.be/WajVKLprgwk>

**Through all the changing scenes of life,
in trouble and in joy,
the praises of my God shall still
my heart and tongue employ.**

**Of his deliverance I will boast,
till all that are distressed
from my example comfort take,
and charm their griefs to rest.**

**O magnify the Lord with me,
with me exalt his name ;
when in distress to him I called,
he to my rescue came.**

**The hosts of God encamp around
the dwellings of the just ;
deliverance he affords to all
who on his succour trust.**

**O make but trial of his love ;
experience will decide
how blest are they, and only they,
who in his truth confide.**

**Fear him, you saints, and you will then
have nothing else to fear ;
make you his service your delight,
your wants shall be his care**

BLESSING

Breathe into us all, your life giving Spirit;
give us your encouragement, confidence
and peace, for we are Easter people and
alleluia is our
song!

