

1 Peter 3:8-22
Feilding Baptist
5.7.26

Call to Worship

Welcome to worship with Feilding Baptist Church!

These are the verses we read at Easter;
Luke 24:1-7

The Resurrection

1 But very early on Sunday morning[a] the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. 2 They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. 3 So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes.

5 The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? 6 He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man[b] must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day."

We sing the song 'What a beautiful name' that has these words;

*Death could not hold You
The veil tore before You
You silence the boast of sin and grave
The heavens are roaring
The praise of Your glory
For You are raised to life again
You have no rival
You have no equal
Now and forever God You reign
Yours is the kingdom
Yours is the glory
Yours is the Name above all names
What a powerful Name it is
What a powerful Name it is
The Name of Jesus Christ my King*

Father, we don't sing these words lightly. We don't come here lightly. This is the truth that Jesus brings, the truth that makes a difference. Because evil isn't the greatest power, Your power is the greatest power. Evil, and death could not hold Jesus. Evil and death do not reign. Light has won, and light will win. And Father we want to be on the winning side. We want to be grateful for what you have done through Jesus. And we are so grateful for the Holy Spirit who continues to comfort, to guide, to inspire, to prompt, to enable. Thank you. Thank you for this time. Please bless us this morning, Amen.

Message - Engage

As disciples of Jesus we are called to engage positively with the world, being a blessing with our mouths and actions, in good times and bad.

Q1. How are we to live with the world?

As we look to answer that question, look at what has been happening in our church world. This week the New Zealand Police visited the house of a New Zealand church leader. There they removed several hunting rifles, and revoked the owner's gun license. The owner saw this as a crime against humanity. But the Police were not there to be mean and nasty. The Police were there in response to several sermons and social media posts where the leader had proposed the removal of all foreign religions from this country. They even suggested burning down the worship centres of other religions. Why?

Because in a part of India some Christian churches were burnt down. So his proposal seemed fair enough to him, tit for tat.

But what matters most? How are we to live with the world?

Our verses today talk about not repaying evil with evil, not repaying insult with insult, but to bless others. It would appear that this response in New Zealand this week is out of line with the Bible, out of line with the teaching and character of Jesus, who we follow.

Let's read;

1 Peter 3:8-22 (NIV - UK)

Suffering for doing good

8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. 10 For,

'Whoever would love life

and see good days

must keep their tongue from evil

and their lips from deceitful speech.

11 They must turn from evil and do good;

they must seek peace and pursue it.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous

and his ears are attentive to their prayer,

but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.'

13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear their threats[b]; do not be frightened.'

15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 17 For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. 19 After being made alive,[d] he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits - 20 to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21 and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience towards God.[e] It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand - with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Footnotes

1 Peter 3:12 Psalm 34:12-16

1 Peter 3:14 Or fear what they fear

1 Peter 3:14 Isaiah 8:12

1 Peter 3:19 Or but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which also

1 Peter 3:21 Or but an appeal to God for a clear conscience

Q2. How are we to live with the world?

This week was also the airing of yet another documentary on the West Coast community of Gloriavale. In response to the evil in the world they are living apart from the world. They believe that they will be contaminated, tainted, dirtied, by the world. This separated community also misses the point of today's verses. God, through Peter, calls us to be a blessing to the world. How can we when we're determined to be separate from the world?

Peter does not advocate for a withdrawal from society, or a hostile counter attack.

Q3. What are we worried about?

The funny thing is, or not so funny, is that evil actually isn't in the world, it's in us! It won't even help if we isolate ourselves! We're in a helpless state. That's why we need Jesus, need the grace and forgiveness that God offers. If nothing else happens at Communion than the reminder of this, of what Jesus has done for us, then it is doing its job.

And when we have that forgiveness, through the Holy Spirit we respond to whatever is going on that is evil in front of us, with blessing. How does that look for us?

We are to respond with five things, v8
Like mindedness,
sympathy
brotherly love, (acting rightly, ie. good Samaritan)
compassion,
humility.

These five qualities are community building. And they also contribute to community well being (Jobes, 215). They are polar opposites to the individualism that evil tempts us with. These qualities were as counter cultural in Roman communities as gentleness is in ours. Humility was seen as shameful and weak. You were expected to defend your honour and reputation. To not return evil for evil, insult for insult (v9) would have raised eyebrows. To bless instead, well, that was unheard of. The Christian response of non retaliation would have been startling within that culture!

As last week's verses reminded us, Jesus did not retaliate or offer any threats (2:23). Instead Jesus trusted himself to God who judges justly. Jesus' life and character, His example are a model for us.

We are called to have is the inner fortitude, the strength of character to break the cycle of evil that spirals downwards when we engage with this game of retaliation. Responding in blessing puts a stop to the behind the scenes gossip and nastiness. For it is about what we say, as much as about what we do. Verses 10 to 12 are from Psalm 34, well worth going back there for a look.

How do we bless? One way is praying sincerely for our enemies (Jobes, 218). But note, you can't truly bless when you want the worse for someone. A change of attitude, on our part, is required.

[If you want to ponder the inheriting a blessing, remember that inheritance is never earned. This isn't about getting a bigger blessing.]

One of the best known verses in 1 Peter is verse 15, be ready to give your defence, to explain the hope that we have. Is that all that it says? No! The main point of this verse are the last three words, with gentleness and respect. Or in another translation, humbly and gently.

So those who rant and yell at people, reminding us that we're all dirty rotten sinners, and that if we don't turn, we'll burn, in hell, are not being very gentle. And often not very humble. Far better to sit down over a cuppa, and share quietly, using everyday language, not Christianese. Our faith should be relatable.

Which is what v16 is about, walking the talk, and talking rightly. Responding with a positive and effective explanation of the gospel. By our words, and by our actions.

Okay, our last five verses, I'd be happy to leave them. Martin Luther, despite finding this a wonderful letter, couldn't make sense of these five verses! How will we? Someone has counted 180 interpretations to do with the flesh and the spirit! Then there's v19 where Jesus went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits. What and where is this? [See the Apostles Creed, but then the retraction for the Nicene Creed a few years later.]

Peter is likely wanting to emphasise Jesus' victory over all evil in both the spirit and human world, now, and forevermore.

The interesting references to Noah, that continue in the same sentence that began in v19. Noah was a hugely significant person in the culture of this region. A likely reason is that this is where the ark is said to have founded, Mt Ararat, when the waters receded from the earth. Such was the notoriety of Noah, five successive Roman emperors had Noah and his wife on one of their coins, with the emperor's head on the other side of course (Jobes, 245). So mentioning Noah was like me mentioning the Yellows rugby team in the first sermon I preached here, ten years ago, trying to connect.

But Peter is more clever than me, drawing in theology. There is a link between Noah and baptism. And it looks so confusing. Is Peter saying that the listeners of his letter will escape the second flood, that is judgement, because they have been baptised? Water appears to be the means of deliverance, in both times, Noah through water, the people through baptism? That works doesn't it? Are we saved through baptism? No, and in fact, the Greek is very clear, that we are saved through the resurrection of Jesus (see the Greek word dia). The word 'through' is the key to understanding, or not misunderstanding these verses. The NIV uses 'by' for the second through, so see the NASB;

NASB

20 ...who once were disobedient when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Finally, v21, our pledge to God, the NIV have got it right. Yes, we pledge our faithfulness to God in baptism. Baptism doesn't cleanse us, it provides the opportunity to pledge our allegiance, pledge to live in relationship with God. And doing this helps us live with a good conscience before God.

So what have I been trying to say, what do these verses say?

In a sentence, as disciples of Jesus we are called to engage positively with the world, being a blessing with our mouths and actions, in good times and bad.

In the church world this week we've had a church leader inciting violence. And a community highlighted, that wants to live separately to the world. What concerns me most is that belief that evil is more powerful than good. Both seem to have the belief that darkness will overcome light. No! Light overcomes darkness every time! Good is more powerful than evil.

Remember in Luke 7 a child is being taken to the cemetery (Luke 7:14). The widow's only son. Jesus reaches out and touches the bier, the coffin. That should have made Him unclean. Instead the boy returned to life. This is a blessing! Jesus did not become unclean, because Jesus is more powerful than uncleanness. Good is more powerful than evil.

Remember the woman who was bleeding who touched Jesus' cloak (Luke 8:43-48)? That should have made Him unclean, but no, He couldn't be unclean, and instead she was healed. What a blessing! Good overcomes evil.

And that's why we celebrate Easter, Jesus rose again, evil did not win! And good things continue to happen in the world when people respond with blessing. Look at the examples we had in our Renew Together series. Social housing in Christchurch, workshops for women in India, support for the disabled, and restoring of relationships between races.

Jesus' suffering was on the way to victory. We might suffer too. But Jesus was not defeated, and nor will we be. We will ultimately share in Jesus' victory. Death has been overcome. Evil is not victorious. Satan has lost. Let's celebrate victory. And when the things of the world get in our faces, let's be a blessing.