

## FROM WORD TO EAR TO HEART TO VOICE TO LIVES LIVED

### 1 Peter 4:7-14

*⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: "whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

Secular Humanists in Canada are worried. They have issued a wakeup call. Look what is happening! Just a few short weeks ago the Premier put the brakes on implementing the sex education curriculum, which taught among other things, homosexual orientation at the grade 3 level. The federal government isn't co-operating with the G-7 to help fund abortions in Third World Countries. Funding for Toronto's Gay Pride parade didn't come through as expected by supporters. What's next? Why?

People of faith are mobilizing. They are writing e-mails to their leaders, they're sitting in parliament, boards and committees. I was surprised to hear such things, but what should be encouraging news for us is raised as a concern for others. "Having your own private religious beliefs is one thing", wrote Marcia McDonald, "but when it's affecting public policy that's another".

Yet, it really can't be otherwise. It is what we pray. "May Your Word pass from the ear to the heart, from the heart to the lip, and from the lip to the life that, as You have promised. Your Word may achieve the purpose for which You send it; ..." God's purpose is that we come to a knowledge of the Truth and live holy lives. That prayer is at the very bottom of the page in the inside cover of your hymnals. "For blessing on the Word".

Our faith cannot help but have an effect on the communities in which we live. It should. It must. It is inevitable. We are the salt of the earth. We are the light in the world. But it goes beyond what "we should not do". We ought not to be a group that is only seen as against things. Against homosexuality. Against Abortion. Against drunkenness. Against the debauchery of this dark age. We rather ought to be seen as standing up for all that is pure, true, honourable, lovely, virtuous and beautiful. We are to, as our text exhorts us, to live lives of prayer, love, and hospitality exercising God given gifts to speak and to serve the Word of God.

The Christian life is all about showing forth what real life is. And today's text reminds us that we have a short time to do it. "The End of All Things is Near (1 Peter 4:7)". Alongside Peter's urgent exhortations to live holy lives we have the images the heavens that shall pass away with a great noise and elements melting with fire and the earth and all things consumed by its heat. We have visions of Judgment Day and Heaven and Hell with souls perishing and souls exalting. The stakes are high. The stakes are the highest they can get. Eternal Life. Eternal Damnation. So today's text reminds Christians to redouble their efforts. Christians live in the context of eternity where this life gives us a sense of urgency to act. If we are going to live the sacrificial life in service to Christ than the time to live that way is today.

Act as one who is self-controlled.

We know the end is near. We know that souls are perishing all around us. It's easy to just lose it. Be possessed with the desire to weep and plead. Work frantically with inefficiency. But to be the weeping evangelist with voices hoarse with emotion and bodies wracked with grief will not endear us to secular humanists around us so that they will listen. I don't know why then, anyone would want to move away from an ordered liturgical service to copy the Pentecostal style of Praise. The secular humanists only have their derision for that. Be self controlled.

Christians are to see themselves on this world like a sinking ship possessing the clarity of a professional sailor who knowing that many lives are to be lost, nevertheless, possesses calm discipline and dispassionately performs his duties as efficiently and quickly as possible to bring as many souls into the lifeboats of salvation as he can before the end. And in that way, the greatest numbers are always saved. Therefore Peter writes, "Be self-controlled".

Love one another. And in witnessing your faith lived out in love those around us will not say "Look, here come the kill joys who want to take away our pleasurable sins" but rather "Look how they love one another". Look how they serve one another. Look how they show hospitality to one another. Look how they see their gifts of teaching, singing, administrating, planning, table lifting, praying, driving or whatever else is required and step forward offering to share such gifts. And all without expectations of praise or coddling or ego stroking or anything else.

Two gifts are singled out. "Whoever speaks, as one who speaks the oracles of God". Whether you are a pastor, given the specific responsibility to speak God's Word publically in worship as I am today, or simply as part of the priesthood of all believers given responsibility to LISTEN AND share your faith one on one, we ought to recognize the gift of God's Word and treat it with reverence. I think of the Second Commandment and meaning here.

"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God".

And as last week where we learned that the "name of the Lord" means so much more than the single syllable word God but rather includes the nature and message of God, we know that in this commandment that we are to treat the name, the character and the message of God with utmost respect and conviction. We know that in the Third Commandment where we are to "Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy" *We are to fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it*". And we encourage others to do likewise. You've probably heard someone say "run like you stole it" well in this case we need to say "speak like you believe it" "listen as if your life depends on it" Let me give you an example.

I remember as a child at an age when you stare at people because you are a child and you can still get away with it. And I was with my family going into a restaurant. And there was an older man sitting at the table across from us. He was alone. And when his meal came he didn't look

around. He wasn't concerned with what others might think. He bowed his head, said grace, and began to eat. He wasn't loud. You couldn't really hear him but he was mouthing the words. And I remember thinking. I bet he really believes. Do I believe?

Do we hold God's Word sacred? Does the Word of God hold a special place in your home? When you speak it does it rattle off your lips carelessly rehearsed? Or do we speak as one who speaks the oracles of God. Is there conviction in our voice? Even here, we all have the opportunity to speak God's Word as "speaking the oracles of God" for what is the liturgy? When you look beside most lines, whether it's the Kyrie or Hymn of Praise you'll see the scripture reference. And we have those at every stage of their spiritual journey present. Wouldn't it be wonderful if some visitor looking around seeing you praying and speaking and singing God's Word in the liturgy today was to say, "I bet he really believes it. Do I believe?"

The second gift specifically singled out is service. May he who serves serve in the strength of the Lord. When you serve in the strength of the Lord, it is the Christ who shines through the act of the Christian so the observer looks past your frail flesh to see the Christ. I like the service of Prayer and Preaching which we have used in a past Lenten Series where the Old Testament canticle is Isaiah 12 "The Lord is my strength and my song and He has become my salvation". We are a city on a hill. We are the light in the darkness. May many seeing your good deeds and praise our Father in heaven. We know the kind of acts we are to do. We live out the commandments in the positive. We protect life. We honour marriage and family. We strive to protect our neighbour's possessions. We give Glory to God and honour the Queen.

Our words and actions testify to the words of our text 1 Peter 4. *To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* We live in God's Dominion. I think of the Fathers of Confederation - Did you know that they were Christians? - when they were trying to find a name for this country. One of them, after reading Psalm 72 in his devotions "May he have dominion from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth" couldn't help but relate our geography as a country between the Atlantic and the Pacific, two seas. Could this be a land that would truly be God's dominion? You see, the faith of a Christian cannot help but impact his community. And so, this land became known as "The Dominion of Canada". And in our 1982 constitution it remains our formal name.

In living out our lives in honour, self-control as Christ did before Pilate, to speak with conviction and even temper "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" and perform the good works Jesus speaks of while it is still day, many will be saved. Unfortunately, some with much work and demonic zeal will find some way to criticize and some cause to persecute Christ and His Church. This theme weaves through both Gospel and Epistle lessons today.

The warning of Peter in the latter verses bears repeating : <sup>12</sup>Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup>But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you". And then, in the latter part of today's Gospel reading also "they will put you out of the synagogues" and "A time is coming when those who put you to death will think that they are performing a service to God".

But we shall not relent in speaking and doing. For by sharing in His suffering we shall also share in His glory. We live in the light of His Ascension knowing that as Christ entered into heavenly realms in body and soul, we also shall enter into glory on the Day of Resurrection Body and Soul, a complete human being.

In this may we rejoice. Exalt Sunday. Hear O Israel the God news of God's Dominion. May we realize our prayers where the Word goes from the ear to the heart to the lips to lives lived.

Amen.