

## The Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 13, 2021

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

### Scripture Readings

*Ezekiel 17:22-24*

Thus says the Lord God: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it."

*2 Peter 1:2-15*

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

*Mark 4:26-34*

And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on

earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

**Hymn:** *LSB 577, Almighty God, Your Word is Cast*



1 Al - might - y God, Your Word is cast Like  
2 Let not the sly sa - tan - ic foe This  
3 Let not the world's de - ceit - ful cares The  
4 So when the pre - cious seed is sown, Life -



seed in - to the ground; Now let the dew of  
ho - ly seed re - move, But give it root in  
ris - ing plant de - stroy, But let it yield a  
giv - ing grace be - stow That all whose souls the



heav'n de - scend And righ - teous fruits a - bound.  
ev - 'ry heart To bring forth fruits of love.  
hun - dred - fold The fruits of peace and joy.  
truth re - ceive Its sav - ing pow'r may know.

**Sermon**

We all know that this world has some problems; we all seem to realize that however good things may seem, it's always tempered by some negatives somewhere. Earthly things can only be so good, we feel -- and so, anything truly amazing is "out of this world." If you really loved what you ate for dinner, you might tell your friends "That restaurant was amazing! The food was out of this world!" It's something extremely good, impressive, enjoyable, and so forth. The idea is that something too good just doesn't fit with the rest of this place; it's transcendent, and this world is not a place where anything purely good is found.

There's a lot of spiritual truth in that idea, even though I would bet you've never thought about it when using that expression. It's a phrase worth thinking about as we read Peter's words to us in this letter today, because what Peter is describing is very much "out of this world." At first glance, it's confusing and overwhelming; his sentence structure alone makes it tough to wade through. But the two letters we have from Peter are great places in the Bible to look at for better understanding how to be "in the world but not of the world," as he is constantly reassuring and encouraging his fellow Christians who are suffering now and looking forward to that eternal home. Towards the end of this letter, he reminds us that "we are waiting for a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells," a truly out-of-this-world promise, both literally and figuratively.

Peter is a great encourager, and he wrote all of this to Christians for that reason. What is the most encouraging thing he can talk about? All the things that are given to us through Jesus! "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises..." He's the one with power; he's the one who gives us everything we need; he's the one who called us; he's the one with glory and goodness. It's all about Jesus doing and us receiving.

Yet while we're still in the world, Peter (and Jesus too in the Gospels) make it clear that a Christian should not be of the world -- we have received out-of-this-world promises and gifts from

God, these life-changing things, so we ought to likewise keep our eyes and attention focused out of this world. Peter goes so far as to say that we have already escaped the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire! Now he's not saying that we have fully escaped sinful desires during this life; he's reminding us that this world is temporary; it's a place of passing. It is full of death and decay, full of ruin and destruction, full of evil and loss.

This corruption is the moral and spiritual state of mankind, our depravity; but more than the moral aspect, it's physical as well, the simple fact that this world and everything in it is temporary and fleeting, passing away a lot more quickly than any of us want to be reminded. That's the corruption of this world we have escaped, because in Christ the inevitable fate of this world is always of secondary importance. Jesus tells us, don't treasure worldly things too highly, because in the end they're all going to crumble and rot, they're all going to be lost; treasure the things of God above all, because they are eternal.

How is it that we've escaped? Peter reminds us: through Jesus, we have become "partakers of the divine nature." Are we part of the divine nature, part of God? And what does it mean to partake anyway? I don't care for that translation of this word; instead of "partakers" I would say "partners" or "companions." It's another form of the word that "fellowship" comes from. Through Jesus, we are companions of God in fellowship with Him, and we are companions and friends with each other because of our shared connection in Him. Humanity was created in God's image, but that image was distorted by the Fall and by sin; in Jesus, it is restored and God's image in us once again comes into focus.

I think that's a great way to put it because that's how Peter himself speaks in this passage: he goes on to describe some of the qualities of people who have escaped this dying world, becoming companions of God, and he says that "whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins." You all know by now that I am indeed so nearsighted that I am practically blind, at least without the wonderful technology of eyeglasses and lenses. On the one hand, I'm glad that my poor physical sight doesn't have to be related to spiritual things, but also I understand his warning for how to look at the world. When you're severely nearsighted, it's not like your vision stops at a certain distance; it just gets fuzzier and fuzzier the farther away you get. His warning against spiritual nearsightedness is a call that echoes Hebrews chapter 12: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."

Let us indeed keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. The farther away we get from him, the less our eyes are on him, the fuzzier and fuzzier our perceptions will become. Keep your eye on the ball, you tell a baseball player. When you're up to bat, don't watch anything else. None of it matters: the other players, the fans in the stands, the clouds and birds overhead, not even the bat in your own hands. Keep your eye on the ball. And we are told to keep our eyes on Jesus, because nothing else matters. Don't be looking at politics and politicians. Don't be looking at bank accounts and 401Ks. Don't be fretting about how things aren't like they were in the old days. Don't be worried about your bucket list or the needs of your family and friends or any of the other millions of things that usually cause anxiety or outrage among us. Our entire culture today seems to run on anxiety and outrage -- but not you. Not the Church. No anxiety, because we know the power of Christ over all things. No outrage, because whatever is wrong now, God will handle it. "Vengeance is mine, says the Lord." He assures us that He will take care of all of it, and it's not our job.

So what does Peter say are the qualities we should be concerned about, what kind of characteristics are fitting for someone who has received all these things from God? Virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness (or perseverance), godliness, brotherly affection, and love. It's worth noticing that when there's a list of sins or evil things in the New Testament, often there are particular actions that are condemned. But when there's a list of positive things for Christians to

imitate or strive for, rarely are there specific actions. Instead, the focus is all on how we do things and how we live our lives, more than what we're actually doing.

Out of all these, there are a couple that jump out at me. Some of them come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the Bible: of course we're encouraged to live virtuous and Godly lives, to show brotherly affection and love to others. But there are two that strike me as less obvious, and therefore more important to notice: perseverance and self-control. Perseverance is continuing to do something even in the face of difficulty, failure, or opposition, and there is going to be opposition to the Christian faith. For anyone tempted to get either mad or sad about the way Christianity is treated by the unbelieving world around us, we have only to remember that Jesus was crystal clear that this was going to happen. "No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you as well," he said. So we need perseverance to stick with it; the word is also translated "steadfastness," which is also great -- being immovable and firm, determined and not subject to change. Let nothing move you from Jesus.

The other one is self-control. If there's one thing that people have trouble with, if there's one thing that our culture today is actively pushing us to disregard, it's self-control. Sixteen times in the New Testament, self-control is mentioned -- either as a virtue that Christians should have, or as a fault when someone does not have it. It's one of those things called "fruits of the Holy Spirit." Simply put, it's the ability to say "no" to things you desire but know are actually bad for you. It's the ability to restrain desires and urges. The world tells us, "Do what makes you happy. Be true to yourself." The Bible tells us that, as fallen, broken, sinful creatures, a lot of what makes us happy is sin. Don't be true to yourself; be true to God. Don't do whatever makes you happy, don't indulge every desire and urge; do what Scripture says is the will of God. Be truly out-of-this-world.

Don't let any pundit, any radio or TV host, any public figure, any ideology or party or anything else -- don't let anything but God and His Word define these things. Keep your eye on the ball, your focus fixed on Jesus. Be steadfast and persevering in faith; let nothing move you away from Jesus and let everything else just roll off you like water on a duck's back. As Peter says, if you do these things, you will not stumble and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of Jesus. Peter says he will always remind us of these things, so may we go back out into this world today with this in our minds and hearts: reminded of all that Jesus has done and still does, and encouraged to follow through every day; to be out of this world.

### **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  
and the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.**

P: Blessed Lord, since You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: **Amen.**

**All: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.**

P: Let us bless the Lord!

C: **Thanks be to God!**

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C: **Amen.**