

Chapel, Lutheran Theological Seminary

Tshwane, Pretoria, S.Africa

15 April 2015

## 1 Pet 1:22-25: “This is the Good News that was Preached to You”

“22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a love of the brethren that is sincere, earnestly love one another from a pure heart 23 having been born anew not of seed that is perishable but imperishable, through the Word of God that is living and abiding. 24 Because

‘All flesh is like grass

And all the glory of the flesh is like the blossom of the grass;

The grass withers

And the flower falls;

25 But the Word of the Lord abides forever.’

And this is the Good News that was preached to you” (1 Pet 1:22-25).

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

1. The second week of Easter is called by its Latin name *Quasimodo geniti infantes* = “just as the having-been-born babes long...” etc. We are in Wednesday of Easter’s second week. I believe my sermon text from 1 Peter 1 has been selected for today on account of its associations with *Quasimodo geniti* Sunday, which is also called “Low Sunday” in the historic calendar. For one thing, the exact phrase occurs just a bit later in 1 Peter, near the beginning of chapter 2 in fact: “Like newly born babes, eagerly long ye for

the pure spiritual milk, in order that by it ye may grow to unto salvation, if ye taste that the Lord is good..." (1 Pet 2:2).

2. Among the many themes of Easter is that of life having been reborn from the dead, just as Jesus our Lord and Savior that first Easter. But it doesn't stop with him. Not just Christ Himself experienced death and resurrection but also Christ's... holy people: *talis rex, qualis grex*. In other words, the new life begins with Jesus' resurrection from the grave that long ago Easter, but quickly extends from the Head who is Christ to the individual members, who we and the corporate people of God are. There are implications here not only for the Resurrection of the Body on the Last Day which we confess in the creeds, but also for our corporate life together now in this world which is fallen, to be sure, but longs for the revelation of the sons of men as Paul writes in Romans 8, for example.

3. So... Easter. Having been born again from the dead. Many commentators point out that this 1 Peter text may have been part of a baptismal homily wherein Peter's epistolary audience was reminded of their having been baptized into the death of Jesus—"in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we may walk in the newness of life" (as Paul puts it in Rom 6:4). Something similar is happening in this passage from 1 Peter: "having been born again from seed that is not perishable but imperishable, through the Word of God that is living and abiding" (1 Pet 1:23).

4. Then St. Peter cites Isaiah 40 in a passage that is familiar to you, and I'd like to make this my point of departure for what remains of this sermon: "All flesh is like grass, and all the glory of the flesh is like the blossom of the grass. The grass withers, the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord endures forever." It's from that portion of Isaiah where the prophet is bidden to "Cry out"—that is, to "Preach!" And the prophet, who seems a bit overwhelmed at this prospect, exclaims, "And what shall I cry out?" (Is 40:6). And then the voice returns with this oracle: "[You are to preach this]: 'All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of Yahweh blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God stands forever'" (Is 40:6-8).

5. It's a morbid, melancholy plaint—an anti-Easter, if you will. But this is the theme of Isaiah's prophetic ministry, if one were to reduce it all to one passage. It's given to him by the Voice (which must be God) to preach. "All men are like grass." In Isaiah's day the great power/civilization in the world was the mighty Assyrian empire—which would attack Judah/Jerusalem and carry off the ten northern tribes, never to be seen or heard from again. So "all men are like grass, and their glory is like the flowers of the field"—i.e., here today, gone tomorrow. Remember what Jesus said regarding the proverbial "lilies of the field"? They neither "toil nor spin," yet not even Solomon is arrayed like one of them in their glory. And yet they quickly wither/die out and are thrown into the oven for fuel (Matt 6:29, the Sermon on the Mount). That's all our great culture/civilization amount to in God's sight: a momentary bloom in a grassy

meadow. But it doesn't last. Today's young beauty is tomorrow's old crone. Only the Word of our God endures forever.

6. Now while I was preparing this sermon I had the darnedest time trying to put these two ideas together. The confusion begins with St. Peter's post-baptismal, post-Easter preaching which somewhat inexplicably cites this ancient, rather morbid text from the prophet Isaiah. What do "newborn babes" who "long for the pure spiritual milk" and "having been raised from the dead, not of seed that is perishable but imperishable" have to do with Isaiah's "all flesh is grass," etc? I'm not sure I've completely figured it out yet, but some ideas have begun to come to me which I'd like to share with you in conclusion.

7. First, only the Word of the Lord endures forever. "The Word they still shall let remain," pens Luther in the Mighty Fortress, though they "take our life, goods, fame, child and wife." This is as true today in the joyous aftermath of Easter—so sure of the victory as we are, one foot already in heaven with the risen Christ by virtue of our baptism—as it is on Good Friday (when God died) or Palm Sunday or Epiphany or Christmas or any particular day before our Lord Jesus returns to take us home with him. That flesh is grass is more than a passing parade of fallen empires and people but part and parcel of life such as we experience it here below, destined though we are for the heavenly Jerusalem. That's my first concluding thought.

8. And my second is like unto it: most of you have been drawn to Lutheran Theological Seminary for training as pastors and deaconesses in Christ's holy church. Sooner than you realize you will enter into your ministries and so find your lives in tune with the passing seasons of the church: to bring Easter joy to your congregation, to lay a saint at rest, courageously to preach the truth to the powerful, to "comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable," as we are fond of saying in America. It's a bit overwhelming, and you may feel like Isaiah who said, "What shall I preach?" to that mysterious Voice that told him to "Cry out!" So that's part of the reason why you're here: to hear the Word of God regularly, to study it, grow in it, and discuss it with each other, to hear it preached in your ears so that you will take it to heart and declare it to others. That's why St. Peter cites old Isaiah during this sparkling new season of Easter, as he does: "For this is the Good News that was preached to you" (1 Pet 1:25b). AMEN

"And the Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." AMEN.

Prof. Dr. John Nordling, CTS Ft. Wayne