

1 Pet 1:22-25

“Love One Another Strenuously”

“22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a love of the brethren that is sincere, love one another strenuously 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. I thought today’s text from 1 Peter looked familiar, and searching my computer files I saw that—sure enough!—I had preached this very text three years ago for the second week of Easter—on 15 April 2015, to be exact. Always when this happens I am tempted to preach the same sermon over again... quite possibly many of you were not students here three years ago when I preached it the first time; and even if you were I probably could count on your not pointing out to me my re-use of an old sermon. But that would be cheating. Most of you are headed for congregations where you will be preaching seemingly the same old texts year after year, and hopefully for many years to come. I knew then that I would have to preach a brand-new sermon on a text I thought I already knew quite well.
2. And that is perhaps the first point to make. As I grow older I become increasingly aware of how deep the Word of God is, how abundant, how full—always more of Jesus Christ and of his gifts than we may happen to think of to satisfy a sermon requirement or a Bible Study. In fact, today’s text says of the seed of the Word that it is not corruptible but incorruptible, and that it is the living and abiding Word of God—or is it the Word of God [who is] living and abiding?—for the Greek admits of both possibilities. And God the Holy Spirit who expresses himself in St. Peter’s elegant Greek intended it just that way.
3. So one of the great joys of being a pastor is being charged—indeed, paid by a congregation or sending agency—to study and grow in the Word of God. And to teach others—hopefully many others—to grow

in the Word unto likeness to Christ. So what facet of the gospel is provided by today's text—which is a word of encouragement for us Christians midway through the second week of Easter for the Sunday of *Quasimodo geniti* = “like new-born babes”? Is it that ponderous participle ἀναγεγεννημένοι = “having been begotten anew” = nom. plur. masc.; perfect pass. ptc. from ἀναγεννάω = “to beget again, to cause to be born again”? That would make a very fine sermon, and there is plenty of lumber here already in 1 Peter to support the idea, for example, of God who “has begotten us unto a living hope,” as Peter puts it in 1 Pet 1:3.

4. Or another point of departure could be “the Word that was proclaimed to you,” which concludes our text in 1 Pet 1:25. That takes Peter's epistolary audience back to the early days when they were first “evangelized”—i.e., taught the gospel, brought to an instruction culminating in baptism, the Holy Eucharist, and steadily growing in the faith—“like new-born babes,” as are we all. So a sermon could easily be preached on that little word “gospel” that St. Peter drops here—you know, εὐαγγέλιον, εὐαγγελίζομαι, and other like cognates we're learning about in Paul's letter to the Romans, for example. Indeed, when you see St. Peter using a word so fully developed in the letters of another apostle, it's at least possible that he's making an intentional reference here to Paul, the other great apostle of emerging Christianity. And that would be a great sermon too, don't you think?
5. But I think my point of departure this time around shall be St. Peter's exhortation in the first verse of today's text: “from a pure heart love one another stringently” (1:22). Now first a word of caution is in order: St. Peter uses the plural imperative “love one another,” which is a command of the law, or at least of sanctification. There is a wrong way to hear the injunction and assume, as many do, that Christianity is nothing but love, loving the outsider, not doctrine but love, not what you believe but what you do—and all similar misconceptions.
6. But a good way to get it right is to remember good old John 3:16 which uses that same verb ἀγαπάω here: “For God so loved the world that He gave his only-begotten Son,” and so forth. Our love, such as it is, is but a dim reflection of God the Father's prior love of sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to our fallen world to purchase and win sinful humanity to himself in Christ Jesus.
7. And once again there is plenty of lumber with which to work—for example, “But in all these things we conquer through Him who loved us” (Rom 8:37). Or “And may God the Father, who loved us and

- gave...” (2 Thess 2:16). Or “And he who loves me shall be loved by my Father, and I shall love him” (Jn 14:21). Etc. You get the idea. God’s loving of us sinners is an extremely well-substantiated point in the NT and we begin there, out of that abundance—indeed, out of that apparent sameness. For that is the gospel. And the gospel, after all, is why we come to church at all and assemble around the Word of God. To hear the good news in Christ Jesus who redeems me.
8. But out of that gospel flows our love for one another, and this is the point St. Peter establishes in today’s text: “love one another strenuously,” he says. And I was astonished to see that that way of putting it also is quite common in the NT, especially in John’s gospel—e.g., “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another” (Jn 13:34). Yesterday afternoon while sitting under the thatched roof I traced this injunction through and found it to occur 8 times in the Johannine literature alone—too many to document here. St. Peter’s use of it is comparatively rare—yet use it indeed in the Johannine sense. Might he, indeed, have been following John—I mean, deliberately? The possibility might be granted, though we can’t pursue it here. But the injunction shows at least how the first Christians were known in that day and time—namely, in their love and concern for one another. And this is a love and concern, I submit, that abides among us too.
 9. Indeed, St. Peter upstages John a bit by adding that adverb ἐκτενῶς, which I have translated “strenuously.” It’s used of prayer in Jonah 3:8; and Acts 12:5. And in Lk 22:44 we find the clause, “and he began to pray the more strenuously [ἐκτενέστερον].” Interestingly, St. Peter uses it of our loving one another—that it’s to be *eagerly, fervently, constantly* (all translations provided by the BDAG). Or, as I have rendered, *strenuously*.
 10. And St. Peter is the only one to put it thus: our loving of one another mirrors that of God’s love for us sinners in Christ Jesus as we bear with, and love, the fellow Christians God puts us into proximity to: for example, you Romans scholars as you help each other out with the daily Greek assignments and those infernal quizzes; as a husband encourages his wife who is going through a difficult time, and as the wife submits out of faithfulness and obedience to her husband; as we remember and respect the parents God gave us, such as they are, and as parents feed, clothe, take care of, raise, and model a godly Christian life for their children. This finally is the kind of “loving one another

- strenuously” that St. Peter intends. The caring for and with the disparate members within the vast Body of Christ.
11. And this is Wednesday, which means today we have the privilege of the Service of Confession and Absolution. Isn’t it interesting that in today’s text we read, “from out of a pure heart love one another strenuously...”! That is, in the Holy Absolution which our ears shall soon hear after confession we will be absolved by a pastor God has located in this place to proclaim release—that is, forgiveness—to each and every Christian who repents and believes the Absolution. Christians can of all people be honest with one another—that is, pure-hearted—and before God because they have been forgiven.
 12. So that is another little detail, easily overlooked, in the abundance of this ample, extremely fulsome address from St. Peter in the middle of *Quasimodo geniti*, the second week in Easter. I predict that there shall be much more to preach on the passage if I am ever assigned it again—like next year when I come. Until then... AMEN.

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