



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

April 6, 2008  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter  
1 Peter 1:17-21  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Acts 2:14a, 36-47  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 67  
Gospel: Luke 24:13-35

### **Live as Strangers Here**

Have you ever had that unusual, maybe even unsettling feeling of walking into a place, some kind of establishment, and knowing you don't really fit in with everyone else? Everyone else maybe looks different, is dressed different, is acting different, and every eye turns and focuses on you and there's this real feeling of being uncomfortable. You must have made a wrong turn and walked into the wrong place.

I've had that happen to me a few times in my life. A few times in college, we went into an establishment that was maybe filled with people that weren't like us and it was a little unsettling. In Europe, I took a wrong turn in Paris and ended up underneath a crosswalk where a bunch of people were heating things in spoons, and I kind of figured that I didn't belong in that setting. But it was something where I couldn't get out of where I was. Do you know that kind of feeling that I am talking about? You are in a place you don't belong and you can't really wait to leave it because it's unsettling and it's uncomfortable.

As Peter writes to the people that were scattered across the provinces of Asia Minor, they were facing difficulty. They were facing persecution that was starting to come to them because they were Christians. He tells us later they had not yet been persecuted to the point of shedding blood. It was probably more of a social nature, different things were taken away from them or different things that they had to face socially with some of the laws that were passed at various times as in the earlier time of Christianity when the Romans would at times target Christians. But as he is writing to these people, he is really reminding them that they are in an uncomfortable, unsettled place while they are in this world because this world is not the best it is going to be.

That's why he, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, urges them and urges us to live as strangers here, to live our lives in a way of knowing that we are in a place that is ultimately a little bit uncomfortable, a little bit unsettled for us because it's a place that is ravaged by sin. And we have something better in store for us. He tells us to live as strangers in reverent awe, in reverent fear, revering God and what he has done for us. We stand in awe of God because, as Peter reminds us, he has bought us with his blood.

There was a time I suppose for each person where this is as good as it gets, right? When we are born in this world, we are sinners, and what awaits us on the other side of this life is nothing but unending agony and suffering in the fires of hell—if that's the case, then hanging on to this world makes an awful lot of sense, doesn't it? Because

this is as good as it gets. The sunshine we have here warms our face. It doesn't cause us unending pain like hell does according to Scripture.

But God tells us that's changed for us. This is no longer as good as it gets for us because before the creation of the world God chose his only Son, chose himself to come into this world to live in our place perfectly. That is why he is called a lamb without blemish or defect. He never once sinned as he went through this world. He never once talked back to his mom or dad when he was a child. He never once thought they were idiots when he became a teenager. He never once rebelled in his 20s. He never once did any of the things that come as naturally to you and me as breathing. He never did any of it. He was perfect. He was without blemish or defect.

Then his blood was still shed. It says you were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. His blood was shed on the cross—what we focused on all through Lent, the suffering of Christ which culminated on Good Friday as we saw our sinless Savior crying out in agony, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" At that point in time, all the punishment that your sins and my sins and the sins that the world deserved was poured out on Christ. He bought us back through his life and through his death. That took away our sins and that now makes us aliens and strangers in this world because now we have something better waiting for us. That is what Peter reminds us. Live as strangers because heaven is really the better thing that we have coming. We are in this place, and we are in it for however long the Lord leaves us here, where we ought to recognize this isn't as good as it gets. Don't set your hearts on the things here, because the things here are here and they're gone. We know that. Loved ones are here and they're gone. Things that we possess are here and they're gone. We know that, but we still struggle at times with living as strangers here. That's why he reminds us that we have every reason to do so because we have something better coming because Jesus lived and died in our place.

That's the "why" he tells us of living as strangers in this world. But Peter doesn't stop there. This morning the Holy Spirit also leads Peter to tell you and me about "what" it means to live as strangers in this world. He says to us, "Since you call on a God who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear."

Think about what he says there when he says "live as strangers." The basic meaning of the word "stranger" is strange, right?—different, not the same as everyone else. If we live in a way that reflects the love God has shown to us and we live according to God's will to thank God for that gift of salvation, not to try to earn it from him, not to try to merit it because we know that can never be, but to thank him that he bought us when we were still sinners, we are going to be strange in the sense of different from the people around us, right?

Peter points out in a sense what that means as he says, "God bought you back from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers," for the people he was writing to, there were both Jews and Gentiles. For the Jews, the empty way of life that was handed down to them by their forefathers wasn't the worship of the true God. It was how they had corrupted the worship of the true God by pointing to the law and saying, "You can get in God's favor by keeping the law;" by erecting the fences around

God's commands, their own manmade laws, thinking that they could keep them. God had said, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Don't work on it. Set it aside for me." So they decided whatever number it was, so many steps are okay, one more step, and you're working. They put up these paper fences and then actually thought they could earn God's love by what they did. He says, "That's an empty way of life. You can't earn God's love." He says, "I just told you; God's love is given to you because Christ lived and died in your place. So don't think you are going to live as strangers so that God gives you something." Not that we would ever do that, right?

You and I in our lives have never once said to God in our thoughts or maybe even more directly in our prayers, "Lord, I really need your help in this and if you do this for me, I won't miss church for a month and I'll read a chapter of the Bible" or whatever stuff we make up; as though we are going to manipulate God. It's kind of like trying to get the car keys from mom and dad. We are going to play the Father against the Son or something like that and try to manipulate God into giving us what we want. Sin makes us foolish and we do some of these foolish things at times thinking that if we do something for God, he must love us more. The fact of the matter is God cannot love you any more than he already does. He lived and died in your place. What greater love can he show you? So, God tells us to get rid of that empty way of life. Don't just fall in line and step with people that might think that way yet today.

Now, to the Gentiles, the people from the Greek culture that Peter was writing to that had become Christians, the empty way of life that was handed down to them by their forefathers involved the worship of false gods and one example would be that that worship of false gods often involved sexual acts that they viewed as a way to worship their god by going to the temple and engaging in temple prostitution. Sexual sins, the things that they once learned that they thought they were worshipping a god, now they had seen from the true God that they were things that were abhorrent to him and that he had called them sin. So now it would be this empty way of life, this worship of false gods, this love of other things and some of these things that they had once thought were good and noble, they now had found out were sinful. So once God has revealed to you that he says this is sin and this is a stench in his nostrils, live as a stranger here and don't continue on in it.

It's not hard to see a lot of things that are empty ways of life in the world around us, right? We see the sins of society and at times we join in with them and we might even be inclined to say "Well, everyone does it. It can't be that bad." Peter kind of confronts that argument for us this morning also, doesn't he? He says "God who judges each man's work with impartiality;" God doesn't decide things by a majority vote. If he says it's "sin," it's sin; that's the end of the story.

So we live as strangers here by not going along with the crowd, by not committing the sexual sins that are prevalent in our society, by not joining in and having that "one too many" and then driving like you hear about on those commercials. We use God's gift of alcohol and God's gift of sex in ways that are pleasing to God, not in ways that just please ourselves. Do we always do it perfectly? No. We sin.

We stand up for what we believe God has said in Scripture. We defend God's truth even when others laugh at it. I don't know if you've ever had the experience of talking to people about various parts of the Bible and then having them kind of react to you as though they are patting you on the head and saying, "That's cute that you still believe this." I've had it happen in my ministry often. I remember as crystal clear as though it was yesterday, sitting in the basement of a church in Millville, Minnesota, meeting with a couple and having the man storm out of the room after he had just told me what an idiot I was for believing what I believed about Scripture. And the sinful nature that lives in me and is strong in me wanted to just snap him like a twig. He was just driving me nuts. I didn't do it, so then I should pat myself on the back because I didn't do it, right? Well, actually, my sinful nature led me to do what anyone else in a situation like that often wants to do, right? In my own mind, I wanted to get back at him. I didn't really do all that well at living as a stranger here in reverent fear. And I'm sure you have your own situations where you don't also.

So what is the answer? The answer is to go back to what Peter told us about, right? We were bought by the blood of Christ. Christ lived perfectly in our place. He never wanted to snap anyone like a twig. He said "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." God sent his son to live perfectly in all these places where you and I join in with the sins of society and he forgives us. He washes those sins away. Then when he says to us, "I love you. You are my own. I bought you back with my blood." That changes us again. It leads us to have a stronger faith so that now we go forward and no, we aren't going to do it perfectly, but we are going to work at it, with God's help, to be better at living as strangers here, living in a way that doesn't reflect society's values but reflects the love God has shown us in Christ. God will give us victories over some of the temptations that come our way. He gets the credit for the victory, not us. And there will be times when Satan will lead us into sin. In those times, don't make excuses. Run to the cross of Christ and know that before creation God knew he would send his Son to die for that sin that you had just committed.

And then, rejoice and stand in holy awe that you have a God that loves you that perfectly!