

# 1 / Parish Retreat 2018: Following Jesus in a World that Doesn't

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it's wonderful to be here. It really is. This was my spiritual home for 20 years, so we came here when I was four, I believe. We came to a family camp, and here we are.

So, family camp 2044, one of those children will probably be the guest speaker. Plan for that. I'm going to look around the room. I'm doing a little bit of exegesis in my audience.

I anticipate there are three types of people in this room. There are those who are weary. You're too tired to even raise your hands. There are those who are heavily burdened.

There are those who are close. I'm not going to tell you what group I am in. Christ comes to give us rest.

His word gives us life. I want to read the passage I'm going to speak on, so you can hold me accountable to it. But it's a long passage. And James told me to talk for a long time.

[ 1 : 08 ] At St. John's, I know there's only one person who's allowed to talk for longer than 23 minutes. And he doesn't even have a first name. He just goes by J.I. So I'm a little apprehensive.

But I think it might be helpful if you stand for the reading. Might ensure you're awake by the way. This is God's word from 1 Peter.

I'm reading from chapter 1 all the way to chapter 2, verse 3. This is the word of the Lord.

Peter. Peter. Peter. Peter.

[ 5 : 20 ] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Now you may be seated.

But only until stay awake. I told Aaron, I anticipate at least two people in this front row are going to be asleep.

But I thought I'd come up with you. That's based on previous knowledge. I have nowhere to put my Bible.

So I'm not, I guess I am standing on this word, but I'm not crumpling on it. So hope. When I was in high school at St. John's in our youth group, well, that would be quite nice.

Thank you. When I was in high school at St. John's, the rector came once. David Short came to youth group once in the five years I was in youth group.

[ 6 : 37 ] And I remember what he said. He came up to the front and started to talk. And what he said was, it has never been harder to be a Christian than it is right now in Vancouver in high school.

Our faith is supposed to be good news that is to bring great joy and is for all people.

So why is it so hard to celebrate and to share this good news? The words of God for us this weekend come from 1 Peter.

It's a letter written by the apostle to Christians who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

Dramatic pause. Peter's writing this letter to Christians who are suffering for their faith.

But they aren't suffering how you think. They aren't experiencing, you know, statewide persecution under Nero, the great persecutions. It's nothing like that. That hasn't happened yet.

[ 7 : 41 ] The persecution they're experiencing at the time of this letter is much more subtle. It's unofficial. It's social persecution. The Christians Peter is writing to, like us in Canada, are not facing arrest or martyrdom.

But instead they're the victims of social ostracism and skepticism. Christians are being mocked and they're being avoided. They're being treated as social outcasts within their own society.

They've been labeled as intolerant and actually atheists because they won't bow down to the idols of their culture. And they refuse to live like their non-Christian neighbors.

Here's some of the texts from 1 Peter to show you what I'm talking about. It's from chapter 2, verse 12. They, the secular culture, accuse you of doing wrong.

Has that ever happened to you in Vancouver? Verse 15. Christians suffer the ignorant talk of foolish men. Chapter 3, verse 9. They are being insulted.

[ 8 : 45 ] The same verse. People are speaking maliciously against your good behavior in Christ. They tease Christians because they're being righteous. In chapter 3, verse 16.

Christians are being slandered. This isn't official state persecution. This is social persecution. And as you hear that, does it remind you of anywhere?

That's the world we inhabit. We experience this unofficial social ostracism and persecution for following Jesus. We are slandered as ignorant, as offensive, as wrong in how we live, in what we believe, in who we worship.

I remember again in high school, and this is now 15 years ago, and the dial has gone much, much past this today. In high school, they bring in special educators, and they were talking about sexuality and diversity.

And so a person we'd never met came to our class, got us to move all the desks to the side, got all the kids to stand in the middle of the class. And what they said is they said, if you support same-sex relationships, I want you to stand on the left side of the class.

[ 9 : 54 ] And if you don't, I want you to stand on the right side of the class. The purpose of the exercise, supposedly, was to reveal and celebrate our class's diversity.

But in reality, the goal was to shame those of us who were deemed intolerant and out of touch. And that's exactly what happened to the three students, all of whom were Christians, who were singled out.

To expose us, so that we might suffer slander and the ignorant talk of foolish men. Which we did. Let me tell you. It was lunch right after that. It was a long lunch. We are unofficially persecuted for our faith in our city. We're slandered. We're accused of doing wrong.

We sometimes receive malicious treatment because of our good behavior in Christ. It's hard to follow Jesus in a world that doesn't, isn't it? And friends, this really shouldn't surprise us.

[ 10 : 52 ] We follow Jesus Christ. And that means we should expect to walk the same road he walked. Jesus set the pattern for our life and interaction with the world.

And therefore, he reveals to us the response we should expect from a non-Christian culture. Jesus is God's son. Perfect. Perfect.

Blameless. Righteous. He came in love to save the world. He's doing all these good deeds. And yet the world rejected him and murdered him. Jesus told his followers in John chapter 15, If the world hates you, it hated me first.

If they persecuted me, they're going to persecute you too. We are marginal in our culture because Jesus was marginal. So the default context of being Christian is conflict with the world around us. That's the default. Whatever our culture may be. We should assume we will be rejected. We will be excluded. We will be slandered for following Jesus. He was marginalized.

[ 11 : 58 ] Therefore, we will be too. And it's into this context of suffering for following Jesus in a non-Christian context that Peter, in his opening sentence of his letter, identifies Christians as two things.

These are scattered Christians who are weary and heavy laden. And he says you're two things. What I want to do this morning is to look at these two things that Peter calls the followers of Jesus. These are the two halves of our identity in Christ. And after each half, I want to examine what Peter commands us to do as we follow Jesus in a world that doesn't.

So if you're linear, if you're a notes person, you might have an outline in front of you. The first part is the first half of who you are as a follower of Jesus and therefore how you should live. And then the second half is the second part of who you are as a follower of Jesus and therefore how you should live.

It's our identity in two parts and therefore our vocation in two parts. Followers of Jesus are two things according to Peter.

[ 13 : 04 ] Look at the very first verse. This is 1 Peter 1, verse 1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect.

This is the first half of our identity in Christ. We are elect. Being elect means being chosen.

Think of an election where the voting public chooses who will represent us in government. Peter tells us that God elects Christians.

He writes our name in the book of life. He has chosen us, you and me, to follow Jesus. This is a really hard teaching.

Because it raises a ton of questions. How can God choose some people to be saved? While others he can seemingly not choose?

[14:04] Or even reject? If God is good, why doesn't he choose everyone? If God so loves the world, why isn't there worldwide universal election and salvation?

Furthermore, if God chooses us, then how does human will fit in? Don't we decide to follow Jesus? Don't we decide to choose for Christ? Don't we decide to put our faith in him and his cross and resurrection? Is there any room for human agency if God chooses us?

Don't we decide to follow Jesus?

Here's what we know. The Bible affirms election or predestination, while also affirming our necessity to repent, to turn, and to follow Jesus and put our faith in him wholly.

[15:29] The Bible says yes to election, and it says yes to free will. J.R. Packer has called election the greatest unanswered assertion of the Bible.

I think that's quite helpful. Election for some is an inconvenient truth in Scripture. So if you believe the Bible is God's word, then you must accept election, while also acknowledging human free will. Now how on earth can we explain this? Well, let's move on and see what Peter says. To those who are elect, and then go to verse 2, who have been chosen, same word, according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father.

Now there's much mystery here, but I'm going to focus on what Peter says, rather than what he doesn't say. Peter states that Christians have been chosen by God, they have been hand-selected, and that God knew who he was going to choose before we even existed.

Note the word chosen, which is in verse 2, also pops up in verse 20, although in the ESV I think it switches it from chosen to predestined. I believe it's the same word in Greek. And this time, it's not speaking of us being chosen, it's speaking of Jesus being chosen.

[16:52] Jesus was chosen to predestined before the creation of the world. So what Peter is saying is, in the same way God the Father chose Jesus Christ to save the world and restore the world by his death and resurrection, so too the same God has chosen, predestined, us before creation.

Notice also in verse 2, God is not just called God. He's called God the Father. We hear this so much, it just totally slips out of our minds, but let's focus on that for a bit.

This is probably the first time after Jesus' ministry that a human being has called Yahweh, the only true God, Father. So if you believe in Jesus, if you live to follow him, Peter declares that God has chosen you.

And he hasn't just chosen you to save you, God has chosen you, and he's chosen to become your Father. God has chosen to adopt you at unimaginable personal expense.

God sees our sin, he sees our brokenness, he sees all the ways we fail, and yet in his mercy, in his goodness, he has chosen us. He has chosen you before the beginning of the world to be his child, to be forgiven and adopted, and enjoy life with him forever.

[18:23] Now this is remarkable, because in answering who we are, Peter must first announce who God is, because it's God as our Father that gives us our identity, because we're his children.

We have no identity apart from him. Our identity flows out of him and his grace. There's a wonderful ancient tradition that we've lost where people change their names when they become Christians. And it's a sign that their identity has completely changed. It's been redefined. They have been recreated as a child of God.

Christian children, historically, were not named until their baptism, because they had no identity until they were baptized into the family of God.

And only once God was acknowledged as their Father did they receive a name, an identity, as a child of him. We are chosen by God.

[19:32] Our identity is found only in him. He is our Father. That's who we are. And because we are chosen, look at verse 3, for all the blessings now lavished upon us as children of God.

If you're weary and heavy laden, let these words wash over you. Verse 3. May grace and peace be yours in abundance. Blessed be God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

By his great mercy, he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead into an inheritance that is imperishable.

undefiled and unfading. Kept in heaven for you who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

I gave a whole sermon on that paragraph last year and I copied it into my talk and had to take out the whole thing. If you're chosen by God, if you are elected to be his child, then everything in verse 3 is yours through faith in Jesus Christ.

[ 20 : 49 ] A living hope, an imperishable inheritance, grace, peace, mercy, protection, faith, salvation, salvation, all of this God has chosen for us and guaranteed through the blood of his son and the gift of his spirit.

That's the first half of our identity. We are chosen by God. We are made his children. And that leads to the first half of our vocation. Why did God choose us?

What are we elected for? The answer is in verse 2. To God's elect, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

Why? To be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood. God chooses us for this purpose.

This is our vocation. To be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood. We live and we breathe now to follow Jesus.

[ 21 : 55 ] To obey him while receiving his forgiveness. We are God's children but we are also his subjects. His citizens. His servants by grace and for obedience.

That's why we're chosen. And the rest of the letter now is about how to be obedient to Jesus in a culture that's entirely opposed to him. What it means to be obedient to Jesus in a world that rejects him.

And we can be obedient to Jesus in a disobedient world only in verse 2 through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. When we follow Jesus God's Holy Spirit begins to make us like him.

It sanctifies us. It makes us holy like he is holy. And that holiness that distinctness that the Holy Spirit transforms us to become is how we represent God in a world that rejects him.

The Holy Spirit does a work in us that enables us to be obedient to Jesus Christ. I want to give one powerful example of this from scripture in Acts 7.

[ 23 : 05 ] This is a terrible chapter of the Bible if you're a Christian. This is the story of Stephen the first martyr. And right after Stephen gives a sermon to the Jewish people the crowd and the court turn on him.

And the justice and the order of the event collapses as people rush at him and he is seized in the middle of his trial. And then there's the scene of a lynching. An enraged possessed mob murders an innocent man.

And in the middle of this horrific scene we are told explicitly that Stephen is full of the Holy Spirit. He's full of the Spirit who's doing a sanctifying work in him in the midst of his own slaughter.

And we read of Stephen being made holy by the Spirit made obedient to Christ. As Stephen is being brutally beaten to death as the stones are landing on his breaking body these are his final words.

Lord Jesus receive my spirit. Lord do not hold this sin against them. Do those words remind you of anyone?

[ 24 : 23 ] Those are near identical to the words of Christ as he breathes his last on the cross. Father receive my spirit. Father do not hold this sin against them.

The words of Stephen at his end through the sanctifying work of the Spirit resemble and reflect the character of Christ. They mirror Jesus' own words and thoughts.

The servant and the master are speaking the same. They resemble each other. That is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit to be made like Jesus and obedient to him.

even in the throes of persecution people should look at us and see the reflection of Jesus Christ because the Holy Spirit is doing a work, a sanctifying work of recreating us to resemble Christ.

And did you notice Peter in verse 2 in the opening sentence of his letter, my goodness we're still in the opening sentence, appeals to God the Father, God the Holy Spirit and God the Son.

[ 25 : 36 ] All three persons of the Trinity are involved in giving us our identity and our vocation. God the Father chooses us to make us his children, God the Son saves us by the sprinkling of his blood and God the Holy Spirit recreates us, sanctifies us to be like him and obedient to Christ.

election, justification, sanctification, chosen, saved, made holy. Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are all at work here.

There is no salvation, there is no Christian without each person of the Trinity at work on our behalf. Our vocation flows out of God's action in our lives.

To be a Christian means you are elect, chosen by God before the foundation of the world. And if you are elect, you are predestined by God the Father and sanctified by the Holy Spirit in order that you might be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled by his blood.

That is your vocation. That's the first half of our identity and our vocation. How are we doing? Is the glass half full or half empty?

[ 26 : 58 ] People need to stretch. Are we doing okay? You're allowed to stand. You can just lift your hands in the middle too. Or not. The second half of our identity, this is quicker, immediately follows in verse 1.

We're still in verse 1, but it is going to be quicker. To those who are elect, exiles. if you follow Jesus, you are in exile.

There are fundamentally two sets of relationships that define human existence. Our relationship to God and our relationship to man. Vertical and horizontal, like a cross.

So we live cruciform lives, cross-shaped lives, in relationship to God and the world. And the reality Peter paints is that if you are chosen and loved by God, you will therefore be rejected and persecuted by humanity.

We are elect, and therefore we are exiles. Jesus' brother, the leader of the Jerusalem church, James, puts it well in chapter 4, verse 4. Don't you know, speaking to Christians, that friendship with the world means enmity against God.

[ 28 : 21 ] Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. The word for exile means foreigner, alien, refugee.

It means someone from another land who is living in a foreign place without citizenship. show. And if you have lived in Vancouver for any period of time, or if you have read a newspaper in the last 12,000 years, you know that our world is skeptical of foreigners.

By default, we are resistant to immigrants and their different cultures and practices. And sometimes we are downright racist toward others who come from other lands.

We become protective of our prosperity and provision and our people. We build walls. We leave unions. There is a human precondition to resist welcoming the foreigner or working with the alien. And Peter uses this metaphor because it's as relevant then as it is today to talk about what it's like to be a Christian. Peter calls Christians exiles, aliens, foreigners, people from another land who are living in a place not their own and bring with them a different culture and a different worldview.

[ 29 : 50 ] And because we are chosen by God, it means that we have surrendered our worldly citizenship to become citizens of the kingdom of heaven. And because we've relinquished our worldly identity for our heavenly one, the world obviously will reject us.

We will suffer for submitting to the reign of Christ. We will be treated as unwanted exiles and resident aliens. This is the tension we all experience if we follow Jesus.

So if you follow Jesus, you are elect and you are in exile. You are chosen by God, but therefore you'll experience rejection by the way. You are saved and therefore you are scoffed at.

So how do we follow Jesus in a world that doesn't? How do we be elect exiles faithfully? What is our vocation?

This is what 1 Peter is writing to address. How to be obedient to Jesus if obedience to him means the world will treat us as enemies and aliens. And Peter starts his answer in verse 13 chapter 1.

[ 31 : 00 ] Peter gives followers of Jesus four initial directives for how to live on earth as elect exiles. Four instructions on how to be obedient to Jesus Christ.

Our vocation now broken down in four parts. The first is in verse 13. Therefore, because of who you are, elect exiles, therefore, preparing your minds for action and being sober minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The first thing we should do is something almost none of us do. We should think often about Jesus' return. We should dwell on it.

We should set our hope fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Be certain in your mind that Jesus is coming back.

Keep your eyes constantly looking forward to that great and glorious day. And as you do, don't place your hope in anything or anyone in this world. They will only let you down.

[ 32 : 16 ] Don't fix your eyes solely on the present. Don't fix them in your past, no matter how difficult. Instead, set your hope on what is unseen, on that future event that is unthinkably glorious, when King Jesus is unveiled for all the world to see.

How do we do that? How do you set your hope on Jesus Christ? How do we be certain in what we cannot see? This requires using our brain.

Look again at verse 13. I love this phrase. Prepare your minds for action. To follow Jesus, you must do so with your brains as well as your bodies.

Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Mind and strength, together. Brains, bodies. Prepare your minds for action. Be clear-headed, sober-minded, completely convinced of what you believe, and your life and your actions will flow from your head to your heart to your hands.

Prepare your minds for action. You cannot be a brainless Christian, according to Peter. You cannot just be about love as some unanchored moral imperative.

[ 33 : 33 ] Instead, he commands us, as we seek to follow Jesus, to use our intellect to explore all the facets and questions we have about our faith. Get to a place where we are certain, where we are able to set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Start with your mind. My first degree was in evolutionary biology. I was a Christian at the time. There weren't many other Christians in evolutionary biology.

Fifteen years ago, let me tell you. But I wanted to be certain that I understood the mechanisms God used in creation, so that I had a more deep appreciation of who he is and how he works and how majestic he is.

Prepare your minds for action. Be certain. What are the questions that you don't have answers to? Are you doing anything to answer those questions? You should. We can't use our bodies until we have fed them.

So, too, you can't follow Jesus until you have inwardly digested his gospel. nourished your soul with his truth.

[ 34 : 54 ] Filled your mind with his knowledge. So, the first tool to journey through life on earth is to set your hope fully on Jesus Christ and to prepare your minds for action.

The second instruction Peter gives Christians living in a non-Christian world is in verses 14 to 16. Peter's second exhortation as elect exiles is to be holy.

That means be different. Be set apart. Be unique. again at verse 15 and 16.

We're given a model for our distinctness, our holiness. As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it's written, be holy as I am holy.

We're to be holy as God is holy. We are to participate with the Spirit at work within us to be sanctified, to be made holy. We are to take on the very character of Christ.

[ 36 : 07 ] We are to become like Christ in how we live. This is what humans are created for, all the way back in Genesis. We are created in God's image to reflect him to the world.

We messed it up in the fall, but now that we've been rescued and recreated, we are now recommissioned to once again live in God's image. Be holy. Be like him.

This leads very briefly to the third and fourth instruction Peter gives Jesus' followers. Third instruction, verse 22.

Love one another earnestly from a pure heart. Peter is speaking to Christians. This is not an evangelistic letter. This is a letter to people who are already Christians.

So there's other passages of scripture about loving your neighbor, your non-Christian neighbor, and actually Peter talks about that later. This is about our relationship to other Christians. Love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

[ 37 : 11 ] We show our holiness. We show we are distinct from a broken world by how we love one another. Our world is selfish.

Our God is selfless. So to be like God, we must become selfless too. And this is actualized by love shown to each other sacrificially.

verse 22 teaches the manifestation, the proof that you are living a life set apart in obedience to Christ is how you love other followers of Jesus.

That's the test. That's the fruit of faith. If I got you to give yourself a grade right now on how well you love other Christians, how pure in your heart are you when you love one another, how are you

doing?

that's the fruit of your faith. That's the proof the Holy Spirit is within you and making you to be like Christ. Jesus himself declared in John 13, by this all people will know that you are my followers if you love one another.

[ 38 : 17 ] Peter didn't make this up. He's getting this idea from the lips of Jesus. The proof that you're holy, that you're a child of God, is that you have God's heart. And that means you love God's children as he does, self sacrificially.

There is nothing more counter-cultural. There is nothing that more fully reflects the character of God than living to love your brothers and sisters as you love yourself.

The fourth and final instruction, we made it, is chapter two, verse two. And look at that, we're at the end of my reading. How did I do that? Verse two.

Like newborn infants, long for pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation. I love this picture.

The final thing Peter tells Christians on how to live like Jesus is to keep craving spiritual nourishment. never be satisfied with your spiritual life.

[ 39 : 25 ] Never let yourself plateau in your faith. Never be satisfied that your relationship with God is good enough, that your knowledge of scripture is now sufficient, that your prayers are adequate.

That'd be like a person who reaches 30 and decides, I've eaten a lot of food in 30 years. I think I can just stop right now. Just coast to 60 with no more food.

I like food, I've got used to food, but it's taking up a big part of my life and I'm just going to go without it for a bit. If you do not keep craving spiritual nourishment, you will become an anemic Christian.

Too weak to follow Jesus and bless the world in which he has placed us. Too feeble to face the suffering that following Jesus entails.

Do you know the only plant in the universe that stops growing? A dead one. The only Christian who decides they can afford to stop growing in their faith is the one who is spiritually dead.

[ 40 : 35 ] If you must keep eating to stay alive, then you must keep growing to sustain your faith. long for pure spiritual nourishment.

That you may grow up into salvation. The faith of a five year old is not going to sustain a thirty five year old. And the faith of a thirty five year old will not sustain an eighty five year old.

We can never let our faith stagnate. We must always strive to grow and to crave spiritual food. food. So you should be in a Bible study.

Even if you're an introvert. You should lead a Bible study if you're an introvert. Talk about trusting God. You should seek to be fed by sermons and teaching.

Write down notes. Not because the preacher is brilliant and you want to quote him in coffee. But because in writing it, it helps you learn.

[ 41 : 33 ] It helps you inwardly digest the spiritual nourishment that they are trying to feed you. Seek to pray regularly with people who are way better at prayer than you are.

It'll feed your soul and shape you as a follower of Christ. Long for pure spiritual milk. Seek out a feast and don't settle for a crumb when it comes to feeding your faith.

And I'm the only person in the room who's allowed to say this, but it's kind of obvious. You go to St. John's. This is an all-you-can-eat buffet of the choicest spiritual food.

Do you realize people go in a pilgrimage from around the world to come here? Dad had a friend who visited and Dr. Packer was preaching. And we felt sorry for the friend. He's not Anglican.

We thought it was going to be really long. It was really long. We turned to the man in the end and he was almost crying. He's like, oh, that's amazing.

[ 42 : 34 ] That was worth the price of my flight. You should be eating up. You have no excuse. There is so much spiritual nourishment at this church. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

In conclusion, and this is the conclusion, I'm not teasing you here. Peter writes to Christians following Jesus in a world that doesn't. And the first thing he tells those who are, the first thing he tells them is this.

You are elect exiles. Chosen by God the Father and therefore rejected by the world. And he then tells them how they should live. Live in obedience to Jesus Christ while redeemed by his blood.

And therefore there are four things you should be doing in your life. Set your hope fully on Christ. Be holy. Love one another. And constantly crave spiritual food.

That is how you follow Jesus. In a world that doesn't. And God bless you as you do. Amen.