

[in place of Sunday Worship, 10 May 2020, Haddington West Church I/w Garvald and Morham may it please God to bless what is offered here, gather us in Christ and lead us into His truth]

2Pt.1,2

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

1Pt.2,2-10

“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone has become the cornerstone,’ and, ‘A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

Dear friend

In Lk.21,33 we find Jesus saying: “Heaven and earth will pass away”. The manner in which he put this was unscientific. Nonetheless it was a true statement of what is now a scientifically established fact. And though this is not the main point to be made, it is remarkable that Jesus should have said this many hundreds of years before science was to be clear about this. However, what is far more important and noteworthy is that the above was only half of a sentence and that he introduced the second half by saying: “but...”!

Now, again, this was not him being scientific before the age of science. He was not saying: "..., but don't worry, this event is a long, long way off." Nor was what followed a common-sense conclusion or general comment on the fact that heaven and earth will pass away. What he *did* say I will come to shortly. But before that, I want to pause here and give us time to be intrigued, perhaps astonished, so that we might the better understand. Because if Jesus was not making a scientific conclusion or some general common-sense comment, introducing it with the word "..., but", then what could he have been referring to? What alternative could there be?! 'Heaven and earth', that is everything, is it not? Surely, it includes all that we are, all that is life and all that life is. Heaven and earth passing away means *everything* is passing away.

And this is true, isn't it? We all must away, subject to this law of decay which determines that what comes to be must cease to be. Life, at the end of the day - is it anything other than the time-bound attempt to carve out a space in which to flourish and grow before waning and ceasing to be? Life is what we manage to wring from what is inevitably passing away. We grow for a time, we enjoy what we can, then we depart. And all the time we are facing the threat of departure. In fact, is the threat of the virus and our fear not what it is because of the truth that heaven and earth will pass away? The virus threatens our very being, because our being, of a 'heaven and earth' kind, is such that it *will pass away*.

At this point let us ask ourselves if we think this is true – is *the* truth and is *all* the truth? We may do, even though, strange to say, our heart desires otherwise. But we should be clear that if this is what we think, we do so because we *believe* it, not because we *know* it, which we simply can't.

But now, hopefully, here, where at the root and centre of our being we find *faith*, we may begin to understand why Jesus would not full-stop after the words "will pass away", but continued to say "..., but...". Because *faith* is a thing by which one may grasp more and understand more. And this is what he said: "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*"

The significance of this, where it is heard, cannot be overstated. And the Christian faith must not overhear it. It means that by hearing his words as one who belongs to him – Jn.10: "*My*

sheep hear my voice” – I have my being in that which shall not pass away! It is a spiritual thing. But as such *it* is life proper.

There is – and only faith grasps this – a way of being which subsists in the word of Christ Jesus, is by this way in him and through him. It exists not by the stuff of ‘heaven and earth’ but by the word of Christ. As I hear his word, this word makes me in him what I am and what I shall become. The passing away of heaven and earth shall not be the passing away of what I am and shall be by his word! So Jesus says to those who belong to him: *“If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”* And again, after this: *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”* (Jn.15, 5.7-8) He is speaking of a new being, of ‘being’ proper and of life proper.

The point of this lengthy introduction is that it may help us get what Peter says verse 2 of our passage: *“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”*

Because the growing he is speaking of, is that of the spiritual being, and is itself a spiritual process. But it is the proper growing of our proper being, even as it is hidden under all the processes belonging to the ‘heaven and earth’ realm which will pass away!

When we speak or hear of ‘growing’ we find it difficult, tied to heaven and earth as we are, to think of it in terms other than natural growth. We find it difficult to think that leaving ourselves entirely to the word of Christ could be our growing, to entrust ourselves fully and without qualification to him to make of us what he will, to believe and hold that *in him* our being is not about passing away, not about decay, nor about all the ways in which we make, and think we have to make, things grow (even Christians, even churches!), but that it is about *“life to the full”*, about *“being built, as living stones, into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”*, that it is about God’s mercy, about God declaring us to be His people on the strength alone of Christ’s death for us to which we are being conformed so as to be raised in him to our proper life (that is: grow!).

Therefore, let us crave the word of Christ, because in it he is himself present with us and we are present to him, and through him our being is with and in God. For the word of Christ is to our proper being and proper growing what its mother's milk is to the newborn infant: it craves it because it is meant to grow and by drinking does just that.

Dear friend, you have the word of Christ. It witnesses to you your givenness to sin and death, your need of God's mercy. It witnesses to you that God showed you mercy through Jesus Christ who died on the cross for you sins and was raised from the dead for your justification, giving you the right by sheer grace to belong to His people. Will you not hear this word in repentance and faith? And in this word have your being, not to belong to all that is set to pass away, but to grow towards that which shall not – declaring *“the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”*

AMEN

“Dear Lord, we thank you that our life is hidden with you in God. Strengthen our faith according to your word that what is now hidden shall be revealed and that though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. In your mercy through the Spirit grow us into that spiritual house that we are meant to be, to the praise and glory of God. Amen.”

[take time to intercede before God for the cause of his Gospel, for going concerns, in thanksgiving and faith; the Lord's prayer;

“You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry.” -Ps.10,17]

1Pt.5,10

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.
