

Holy Living
I Peter 1:13-25

Peter began his instructions to the churches scattered throughout Asia Minor with a command to “be holy”. *Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, “you shall be holy, for I am holy.”*

Eugene Petersen paraphrased this verse in The Message in a powerful way. *“As obedient children, let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God’s life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness. God said, “I am holy; you be holy.”*

Holy living is a way of life shaped by God’s life. We are holy because God has chosen us and God is holy. We are set apart because God entered into a covenant with us and calls us to a special kind of living and that holy living sets us apart from the world around us. It has been said “that which is holy is charged with an ultimate energy that may be dangerous, like electricity, a power that calls for insulation and that may not be approached casually.” (I Peter, Eugene Boring p. 71)

Friends, holy living is a life of non-conformity to the ways of the world. And it is about all of our lives. God does not allow us to compartmentalize our lives into church life and work or home life. We cannot be one way at school and another way at church. We cannot be one way on the sports field and another way with our church friends. We cannot respond to people on a zoom call for work one way and to our families confined to our homes in another. We cannot act one way at the grocery store and another way when we meet a friend to talk. We are to pattern our conduct - our whole lives on the character of God. How do we do that? Peter gave us some guidance.

First, Peter said live in reverent fear. The word translated fear means awe or wonder. So think about what it means to be in reverent awe of someone. There was a woman who spent her summers in the same town in Vermont as did Paul Newman before he died. She got up very early one Sunday morning to take a long walk and to go bird watching. When she got back home, it was just 8 a.m. and the rest of the family was still sleeping, so she decided to run into town and gratify this craving she had for something cold and sweet by going to the bakery shop, which was also the ice cream shop, and get a double dip ice cream cone. She hopped into the car, drove into town, which was completely empty at that time, and parked in front of the Ice Cream and Bakery Shop.

The only other customer there was Paul Newman, sitting at the counter eating a doughnut and having coffee. She thought to herself, this is no big deal, it's his town, too, and this poor man is entitled to his privacy just like anyone else. So I'll not make a big deal out of this. I'll just go up and get my ice cream cone like he is any other person in the world. And she did.

She nodded to Paul Newman, put her two dollars on the counter and ordered her double-dip of ice cream. And after she completed the transaction, she walked on out, got to the car, and realized that she had a handful of change but no ice cream.

She thought she had just taken her change and left, so she went back inside expecting to see the ice cream cone in a little holder, or in the hand of the clerk, or something. She went over and was about to tell the clerk what happened, but glanced over at Paul Newman, who broke into this wonderfully friendly, warm grin and said, 'You put it in your purse.' (—Loyal Jones and Billy Edd

Wheeler, eds. *Hometown Humor, USA: Over 300 Jokes and Stories From the Porch Swings, Barber Shops, Corner Cafes and Beauty Parlors of America* (Little Rock, Ark.: August House, 1991), 140-41.)

Reverent fear can cause us to be awestruck by someone. Today that is often movie stars, musicians or athletes that we admire or look up to. But what does it mean to live in reverent

awe of God?

A pastor tells about a family with a little two year old girl who visited her church. During the service, she invited all the children present to come forward to hear a story. When she finished the story, she instructed the children to return to sit with their parents. The visiting child remained in the front, standing alone in the chancel area facing the stained glass window, oblivious to other people and activity. She simply stood in silence, having caught a glimpse of something the rest had failed to see. Was it the light coming through the stained glass? Was it the high-vaulted ceiling? Was it the holy mystery of God? After a long time, the little girl quietly turned and went back to be with her parents.

This child teaches us what holy living is all about - she knew what reverent awe was. She and other children can remind us of what it means to be open to the holy for she had not yet been conditioned to miss it. (As referenced by Bob Olmstead, 11 April 1993, Reno, Nev.)

Living in reverent awe means we are open to the holy and we honor God as the mysterious God. We recognize God as the one who ransomed us from the old life through the blood of the Lamb - the very life of his Son - Jesus Christ. Peter said blood was more precious than silver or gold - for blood means life. Our blood must run through our veins and arteries for us to be alive. Without blood we die. The blood of Jesus represents the very life of Jesus - the life he gave for us. That is something to be in awe of. Eugene Petersen describes it this way ... *Your life is a journey you must travel with a deep consciousness of God. It cost God plenty to get you out of that dead-end, empty-headed life you grew up in. He paid with Christ's sacred blood, you know. He died like an unblemished, sacrificial lamb. And this was no afterthought.*

Even though it has only lately - at the end of the ages - become public knowledge, God always knew he was going to do this for you. It's because of this sacrificed Messiah, whom God

then raised from the dead and glorified, that you trust God, that you know you have a future in God.

When we have a deep consciousness of God we live in reverent awe. We take time to think on these things so we do not lose the child like wonder at the mystery of a God who loves us this much.

Secondly, Peter said love one another deeply from the heart. When we have experienced the mystery of a God who loves us beyond imagining our hearts are filled with that same kind of love for others. It is an unconditional love that demands that we love as if our lives depended on it. God's love teaches us that we are to love all God's children - not those that fit our mold, look like us, or do everything the way we think they should. The love that Peter was talking about is brotherly - sisterly - family love. This love is built on relationships that are bound together by Christ's sacrifice.

Today is Mother's Day. It no doubt will be a different kind of Mother's Day for many but still a day to be grateful for many of us learned what it means to love from our Mothers. A mother's love is special. Think about it. It takes a special kind of love to be excited as your body is reshaped over nine months. To experience the pain of childbirth that immediately brings a smile of joy at the sound of a baby's first cry. To have another life within you that requires you to change your habits and center on another. Being a mother requires a caring for others with a deep love. Being a mother demands the willingness to go the extra mile - middle of the night feedings, changing diapers, being a cook, a nurse, a teacher, a coach, a disciplinarian and a friend. Being a mother changes us because loving another human being that you brought into the world - a part of you - makes us vulnerable. For that other human being can and often does hurt us deeply while we continue to love them unconditionally. Loving does not always

mean letting a child do what they want. God knows that. For sometimes God has to pass judgment on God's children in the same way that parents exercise discipline on the wayward child or teenager. Love requires sacrifice and can be painful. But as every mother knows - the love of a child is worth it!

Loving one another deeply is what you do as a mother and in a family. It is also the way we love one another as a community of faith. For as God's covenant community we are called to the same kind of caring, self-giving, unconditional love revealed in the life and death of Jesus. Holy living means we love one another deeply with words and actions - modeling our lives on the life of Christ. In this time and place that means loving one another from a distance but checking in with one another regularly and being sure all are well. And friends, loving one another, loving others deeply means we will stay concerned about how our actions can affect others. And it may mean that we stay apart longer than we would like because we love others deeply and do not want to be part of spreading this virus to others.

Peter finished this section by saying that holy living is grounded in the Word of God. He quoted the prophet Isaiah - *the grass withers, the flower fades but the Word of the Lord endures forever*. The Word of the Lord will always be with us. The challenge is whether we will know what it says so that we can be changed by it. If we are to be about holy living the only way for that to happen is for us to be rooted, grounded and nourished by the Word of God. When we are, we interact with the world differently for we live as holy people.

Friends, the doors of the church may be closed but the word of God is still available to us. Take this time to read scripture, to remember God's promises, God's faithfulness and God's call to be holy. Allow God's words to seep deeply into your souls. Reflect on Jesus' teachings with the disciples that called them to a different way of life. Have conversations with friends

about what scripture says. Reflect on what you learn and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into a life of holy living.

In an article in The Presbyterian Outlook a couple years ago Cindy Rouse-Baird wrote about an encounter she had - an encounter that reveals what holy living looks like.

One morning, on the way to Bible study, she headed to Starbucks. As she approached, she noticed a man sitting in a corner outside of the store. She walked over and knelt down beside him. It took a lot of effort for him to raise his head. She asked his name and how long he had been there. It surprised her to learn he had been there possibly for at least two days. She decided they should go inside to get warm. He stood and she saw the bottle of vodka. He would not give it to her and she was not going to argue with him. So they sat there and talked even though it was 30 degrees and sunny. With tears in his eyes he told her that he had a wife and children he loved very much. But at this moment, he obviously loved the vodka more. She could see into his soul. It was a good soul that could not get beyond his addiction. He remarked that God loved him. She could tell he knew God very well.

She asked him, "What do you want me to do?"

As she was calling his wife as he asked, policemen, who had been alerted to the situation, arrived. She briefed them and they talked to his wife also. Her new friend seemed to become very nervous and scared. He was afraid the policemen were going to take him to jail. She reached for his hands and held them. Looking into his eyes she tried to reassure him that he had not done anything wrong. She told him to try to think of these two officers as his angels here to take care of him. He smiled at her and didn't seem to be so afraid at that point. Then the officers said they were taking him a couple blocks over to the Hospital Emergency Room. They were just as concerned about him as she was. Then she said goodbye.

The story does not quite end there. Later that day she got a phone call from his “former” wife and on behalf of her mother-in-law to thank her for taking care of John. They could not imagine how many people walked past him over the last two days. She said to them, “How could I not help him...I am a Christian...isn’t that what we are suppose to do?”

(The Presbyterian Outlook, January 5, 2009 p. 19)

Friends, isn’t that what we are suppose to do? To reach out to those in need. To help and love one another. Holy Living - a way of life shaped by God’s life is what we are supposed to do as Christians...it is our calling...it is our challenge... And friends, it doesn’t require us to have our doors open...