

First Presbyterian Church
1 Peter 1:1-9, “Priceless Inheritance”
An expanded and modernized rewrite of the passage
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 4/16/2023

[Verse 1]

Peter, (for those who don't know me, I'm now a special ambassador sent out by Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Messiah (in Hebrew) or the Christ (in Greek). I have a background as an impulsive, foul-mouthed fisherman with a short fuse, so Jesus thought I would be a great choice to lay the foundations of the church.

While some wonder if an Artificial Intelligence chatbot could one day predict the future, I write to you who were chosen in advance by the Original Intelligence who has always known both the past and the future at a glance. You were not selected by an algorithm in cyberspace but by the One who crafts the rhythms of time and space. You have been hand-picked for all-time as God's own people.

I write to you as exiles, strangers, and wanderers who have taken up residence in the Pacific Northwest of the United States of America, across the state of Oregon, throughout the Willamette Valley, in a region long inhabited by indigenous tribes along the South Yamhill and the Willamette rivers.

Though the leaders of your American Empire loudly proclaim, “In God We Trust!” their actions fail to bring Shalom to the land. You may hold citizenship here, but you are not at home in any nation-state or political party. You are strangers here just as Abraham and Sarah were when they journeyed toward the Promised Land, as Israel was when they were oppressed by the Egyptian Empire. Your true home is found in your identity as a creature within God's creation, as part of the intimately connected beauty of the ecosystem you share in. You are on a journey toward the promised Kingdom of God which is found through paying attention to Jesus.

[Verse 2]

I write to you as people who constantly participate in the life of the Triune God—not just as an idea you're supposed to believe, but as a part of your daily rhythm

which frames your identity and makes sense of your relationships. “You Are Participating In The Life of The Trinity.” At first it sounds daunting, complex, and philosophical, but trust me when I say that there is no need for you to be anxious about living up to this gracious reality. You have not been chosen by God because of your ability to keep up appearances or accomplish great things. Friends, you have been selected simply because God the Father (who knows all things) knew in advance that you would join in the mission to set things right in the world. Yes, you are worth so much that God knew you before you were born.

This advance-knowledge of God is certainly a mystery to us, but it isn’t locked in a vault far away—it is on display in your life through the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sanctifies you, makes you holy, guarantees that one day you will share the character of Jesus, even though now you take faltering steps forward and backward. A personal trainer at the gym can’t show you how fit you’ll eventually be after you’re done working out (at least not with any integrity), but the Spirit of God can! God the Father chose you in advance but the sanctifying work of God the Holy Spirit makes that choice into a reality as your character is changed from the inside out. That’s the Spirit’s job. Choosing to accept life with the Spirit and cooperate with the Spirit’s activity is up to you.

There’s a very important point to all of this. You are chosen and sanctified so that you can live a life of obedience to Jesus Christ. People who live in obedience aren’t just following a list rules. No! They obey by bringing joy, beauty, healing, hope, wisdom, laughter, good food, warm hugs, forgiveness and love to all who come near to them. This is who you are and what God has in store for you. This is why you were marked as forgiven people by the blood of Christ.

Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

[Verse 3]

Therefore, let all of us who share in this compelling identity and purpose give praise to the Living God. Not just to the god of our imagining, the god of wish-fulfillment and convenience, the god of Freudian projection, or the god of middle-class comforts (realized or hoped for), but to the only true God. Give praise to the

very same God who was called “Father” by Jesus while walking the dusty streets of Palestine and sailing upon the Sea of Galilee.

The God we praise sent Jesus of Nazareth to fulfill the promises made about the Messiah: the chosen king who would restore greatness to Israel. This title identified Jesus as the Anointed One of God who was sent to turn the world right-side up. As God’s anointed, Jesus was not only approved for service in God’s name, but empowered to demonstrate God’s kingly rule on earth. God’s plan has delivered a new way of life on earth – a new birth.

We’ve done a lot of things that don’t fit into that way of life—things that point more accurately toward a way of death. But showing great mercy, God has seen to it that we are reset, renewed, and reborn. Straight out of the womb of God we take our first hopeful breath. Though we remain rooted to the same bodies and hometowns we were in before, we can now engage life without fear of loss or death. We’ve been born into a new and living hope. We are Easter people.

[Verse 4]

But on what basis can we really have such a hope? Can anyone *prove* that this isn’t just a mind-game, a passing fad, or a way for the powerful to stay in power? Who would waste what little time we have on something flimsy? Fortunately, our hope does not float on good vibes or shallow promises. Our hope rests on a guaranteed inheritance. Are you thinking of your family inheritance that was split in the divorce? This inheritance is nothing like that. It’s more solid than the money in your 401k, the building we worship in, the people we worship with, or the Presbyterian Church denomination. If our hope was based on these temporary things we would have no hope at all.

Fortunately, God has given us something deep and abiding to assure our hope. We have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. Our inheritance comes from God’s choice to include us as children in the family of God. No thief can steal it. No bank can foreclose on it. No amount of pollution can poison it. No army can claim it. Your new family inheritance is yours forever, and it will never leave you stranded. This inheritance is kept by God in heaven for you.

[Verse 5]

Though it is not stored here on earth, you access this immense treasure any time you want! This is the beauty of faith. True faith is not “a feeling you get” when you think about the future. It’s not a vague sense of spirituality that you get when you breathe in fresh air. Faith is present when you put your weight down on the promises of God. When you rely on God like that, your faith shields you with God’s power from deception and temptation. True faith puts you in a place where you can see the world clearly and understand what your life really means.

This is what life with God is about in the present time. But there will come a day when faith is no longer needed, for on that final day our salvation in Christ will be fully realized when he returns.

[Verse 6]

Have I given you enough reason to shout? C’mon, can I get an “Amen” here? News like this fills you with joy and anticipation, even though you are going through a tough time: The way you see the world through faith in Jesus is not the same as your neighbors. Your finances haven’t come through the way you thought they would; family members have died or lost their ability to get around with ease; the future is unclear and at times foreboding. No doubt some of you have suffered grief or pain that nobody else in your community knows about. That is a heavy weight to carry, and you need not carry it on your own. We all suffer from different trials.

[Verse 7]

Some have asked me, why should a person with true faith, who is sanctified by God’s Spirit, who shares in such a glorious inheritance with Christ, who was known and chosen in advance by God have to suffer through these kinds of things? If we still have to suffer and groan with the rest of creation, if we fare no better (and sometimes worse!) than the wicked, then what value are God’s promises to us? Why these many trials?

These have come so that your faith may be proved genuine. Untested faith is like an untested student, an untested engine block, an untested bridge. Any of these may look the part, but when the exam comes, when the heat rises, when the weight

becomes heavy, then it's easy to see if they are legitimate or not. In the same way, your faith must be proven. Your faith is worth more than pure, refined gold (even at \$2,000 an ounce). Gold can be stolen; its value can plummet at a moment's notice. But your faith cannot be taken from you, and it will never wear out, get lost, or lose its value.

So when difficulty comes your way—especially if it is because of your association with Jesus—that's when your faith is being tested. When it proves to be genuine (and it will!), the praise won't go to you as if you had accomplished something great. The praise, glory and honor will go to the only One who is worthy of such things when the whole world sees Jesus Christ for who he truly is.

[Verse 8]

You have not seen Jesus—at least not physically. But I have told you about him along with many other eyewitnesses from Jesus' own time on earth. You have learned about Jesus from our words and the testimony of generations of people who have followed. But there's something better: through the Holy Spirit you can know Jesus in your own life. This is how you have come to love someone you have never seen! When we connect with the Living God in this way it produces an abiding sense of wellbeing, wonder. We are set right in the world God has made which gives us a joy that words are not adequate for.

[Verse 9]

This love and joy (in the midst of difficulty, no less), are God's own testimony to you that your faith has been set on the right thing. Your communal life as a church demonstrates that faith is not about a momentary conversion that fades away when the emotional high wears off. Neither is faith about a promise that remains far off in the future. This church, while gathered in worship or while spread out across the region, is showing the world that salvation is not something you wait to see after you die. Indeed, something amazing is happening among you, though it might seem mundane and unremarkable to you: as a community that ministers to each other, loves your neighbors, welcomes strangers, confesses sin, worships God, and celebrates the beauty of creation—you are truly receiving the end result of your faith. *This* is the salvation of your souls in real time. Through faith we can live in heaven on earth.