

Sermon Draft

Text: 1 Peter 1:17–25

Sermon: “In Christ We Are Changed”

The Third Sunday of Easter reveals the resurrected Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, especially in the breaking of the bread in our Gospel. Here is hope in the midst of despair, the Gospel comforting aching hearts. The Epistle from 1 Peter brings Jesus' victory into our own bodies.

Jesus' resurrection changed everything. When you've been rescued from a lethal situation or restored to health, there's a new sense of life.

“I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy” (Ps 116:1). The psalmist delights in the Lord because ***“when I was brought low, he saved me”*** (116:6). If you had been plucked by a helicopter from a raging flood, you'd gladly follow the directions. “Sit here.” “Yes, sir! Thanks!”

Jesus' resurrection has changed everything. It brings new clarity, joy, and life to even the darkest days. I am rescued. I am baptized. I will live forever.

In today's Epistle, Peter revels in the kindness of our Father. He rescued us from our dire predicament. Not only did he pour out his Son's blood to ransom us, but he raised him from the dead, changing everything for us. Peter proclaims: The resurrected Jesus makes you eternally free.

We were born of perishable seed. Peter writes, ***"you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers"*** (v 18).

Since the human genome has been mapped, we're learning about the design of our genetic code. Our hair color, eye color, and potential for height and intellect were established at conception.

Sadly, we all inherited terrible birth defects: a sinful nature and a countdown clock. Peter calls our inheritance ***“futile ways”*** and ***“perishable seed.”*** Futility is part of our genetic code since Adam’s fall.

Futility abounds. We’re quick to repeat the same mistake or evil thought. We’re quick to excuse our sins and keep track of others’ sins. Relationships crumble all around us. We can’t stop illnesses. And look around: there’s pointless violence, needless pain, ugly addictions, rampant selfishness, and false gods that abound. It’s all because of this infection we caught from our forefathers.

We’re never going to stop all crime, cure all diseases, and protect all from violence. We’re never going to end death. Unless our Lord returns first, these bodies will fail us. Peter quotes Isaiah, ***“All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls”*** (v 24).

There are those beautiful people in your life. They bring smiles to our faces and joy to our days. But the tragic fact is that all the flowers of mankind will wither. We're born to futility and death. That's what it means that we're born of "***perishable seed.***"

But we were ransomed by Jesus' blood. Peter proclaims, "***you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot***" (vs. 18–19).

Ransomed is a beautiful word for Jesus' saving work for us. Jesus said, "***For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many***" (Mark 10:45). *Ransomed* means "set free," the word for purchasing a slave's freedom, a useful image for winning our release from eternal futility and death.

By what were we purchased from the infection of perishable seed?

“Not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (vs. 18–19). If perishable money could have ransomed us, we might have been able to pay it. But it requires a holy, powerful currency: the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

The world counted Jesus’ death of Jesus and the shedding of his blood as futile. The world thought they had won. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit do we see Jesus hanging on the cross as anything but futility. But by the power of the Holy Spirit we see Jesus’ death and resurrection for what it is, victory of sin, death and the devil.

How can the death of this most beautiful flower who healed the sick; raised the dead; opened blind eyes and deaf ears; preached good news to the poor, forgiveness to sinners, comfort to the troubled, and life to the dying—how can the falling of Jesus be good?

This was the Father's plan for our rescue. Jesus, the only conceived person ever to be free of perishable seed, took on our wilting. He, the innocent Lamb of God, had poured out on him the punishment for all rebellion, the wrath for all evil, and the wages of sin poured out in full. All so that God's only-begotten Son could pour out his blood for us.

Jesus is the full payment for freedom from futility and death. As Luther put it in his explanation of the Second Article of the Creed, **"I believe that Jesus Christ . . . is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sin, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and with his innocent**

suffering and death that I may be his own” (Small Catechism). Jesus redeemed us with his blood.

This is the heart of today’s Epistle, of this joyful season, and of every Sunday. The Lord is risen! *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!* The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the opposite of futility. Death now has become futile! What can death do? Scare us, concern us, stalk us, but in Christ Jesus it cannot harm us. It must release us, just as it released our Lord Jesus. Jesus’ death was not the mere withering of another blade of grass; it was the brilliant, saving plan of your heavenly Father to rescue all fallen mankind.

Jesus appeared to be the weak for us. But death had no right to claim him; he was the completely innocent Son of God, the sinless Son of Man. Jesus destroyed death from the inside. Death died. It had to release our Savior.

Consequently, his grave is empty and so will ours be. Death's designs, Satan's strategies, and all the cunning and plans of men against Christ Jesus and his Holy Church are futile. They will all fail. They will all wither and be turned for our good.

As God raised Jesus from the dead. So all who believe in Jesus' resurrection are declared innocent, free! Even more, sin's infection, which still lingers in our mortal bodies, will soon be completely eradicated! Death is kaput. Jesus lives. God raised him from the dead for us. So, we're set free by the good news of Jesus! ***"This word is the good news that was preached to you"*** (v 25).

Luther comments on the preached Gospel: ***"To be sure, it is quickly spoken and heard; but when it enters the heart, it cannot die or pass away. Nor does it let you die. It holds you as long as you cling to it. Thus, when I hear that Jesus Christ died, took away my sin, gained heaven for me, and gave me all that He has, I am***

hearing the Gospel. The Word is soon gone when it is preached; but when it falls into the heart and is grasped by faith, it can never slip away. No creature can invalidate this truth. The depths of hell can do nothing against it; and even if I am already in the jaws of the devil, I must come out and remain where the Word remains, if I can take hold of it. Therefore St. Peter says with good reason that you need not look for anything else than what we have preached" (AE 30:45).

Yes, ***"All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.' And this word is the good news that was preached to you"*** (vs. 24–25). The Word of the Lord remains forever, so we remain forever. The Word of the Lord proclaims Jesus' ransoming blood and saving resurrection, so our freedom and new life in Christ cannot fail. We are set free by the Gospel of Jesus.

And born to new life in loving service by this imperishable seed:

“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” (vs. 22–23).

Before, we were trapped because of inherited sinfulness of perishable seed, but now, in Holy Baptism, we’ve been born again of imperishable seed. What blessed comfort Jesus’ resurrection gives! His eternal life now lives in his baptized believers, and born of this imperishable seed, we, like your Jesus, live. And our work in him, like his work, is not in vain.

Amen