

Sermon 30th August 2009 (2nd Peter 1v12-21) “Reminding you of these things”

There used to be a line in the old song “Go tell it on the mountain” which said “If you can preach like Peter, if you can pray like Paul, go tell it to your neighbour that Jesus died for all.”

As a preacher, what would it be like to preach like Peter?

This guy preached the first ever sermon on the day of Pentecost – and 3,000 people were converted in a single day.

Eat your heart out Billy Graham!

And most preachers use personal anecdotes to illustrate their sermons, and they tell you stories about their childhood, but this guy could speak *firsthand* about Lazarus, about Water walking, about the Transfiguration, about the Last supper and the Resurrection.

You’d be really pleased if your minister was taking sermon tips from the apostle Peter!

Or would you?

Because, what does Peter say in this part of his letter?

v12 “Therefore I intend to keep on reminding you of these things, though you know them already”

v13. “I think it right to refresh your memory”

v15 “I will make every effort, so you will recall these things”

Three times he labours the point: that he likes to repeat himself – endlessly.

He knows that they know it, but he wants to tell them again and he wants to warn them that he intends to keep telling them again.

In a sense he says “I am going to repeat myself, until I die, and then, just when you think I’m gone, I’ll find a way to go on repeating myself.”

It’s like the African preacher who said to his pastoral students:

“First I tells ‘em what I’m going to tell ‘em,

Then I tells ‘em,

The I tells ‘em what I told ‘em.”

Actually, God is into repetition.

He is constantly reminding us of that which we so quickly forget.

Deuteronomy 5:15 tells us that the Sabbath was given to remind the people that they’d once worked as slaves and God had brought them out of Egypt.

The Passover was given for the same purposes – to remind people of what God had done.

Deuteronomy 6 tell the Israelites not only to read God’s word, but to meditate on it and remember it, and tie it to their head and hands and engrave it on their doorposts so they keep remembering it.

Just as we are given Christmas and Easter and Pentecost and Lord’s day, the first day of the week, to remind us of the Life Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

And we need to be kept remembering – because there are a whole stream of other influences telling us other stories, and other views of ourselves, and other value systems, all the time.

If you think about how much Christian teaching you are getting,
how much time you allow yourself to be reminded of what God has done for you,
and who you are in him,
and what God wants from you
and then compare to how many *other* voices and other influences you allow into your
life, I suspect you might not be so grudging of the 25 min or so you listen to a sermon.

Even if it is a repeat!

That's one of the reasons we are starting Adult Sunday School next week,
because we just need more reminders of what it is all about,
(even if we know in the first place.)

The idea is that if this gospel sinks in,
if you hear it enough,
then when you walk down the street, you will be remembering that you belong to
God.

When you wake in the morning – you will know that Christ died for you.
When the world fills your head with junk, and tempts you with garbage, you will
remember what the truth is and be able to resist.

Martin Luther speaks of being tempted by the Devil, and then remembering that he'd
been baptised. That's who he was! Devil, go to hell!

Read back through the first chapter of this letter and look how often the world
“knowledge” appears.

v2. Grace and Peace come through the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ.

v3 Diving power that equips us to live comes through knowledge.

v.5 Support your faith with goodness and goodness with knowledge.

*“Therefore I intend to keep on reminding you of these things, though you know them
already and are established in the truth that has come to you.”*

There's something quite remarkable in that verse.

Peter is going to keep on reminding them of these things - it's a future tense.

But verse 13 tells us, he's soon going to be dead.

Indeed, as I said before, some people think he's already dead when this letter is
written in his name.

How is a dead apostle going to keep reminding people of the truth?

Well, actually, isn't he doing that right now?

You see, when we talk about our Church, we say that it is “Holy Catholic and
Apostolic.”

That means that today's church is based upon, and constantly reminded by, the
teaching of the apostles.

That's what gives the Church its authority.

It doesn't have the right to decide what's true.

Its mission is to keep faithfully repeating what the apostles taught.

Repetition is the name of the game.

When we say that the Church of Scotland is a Reformed Church,
we are saying that in 1560, the reformers re-*formed* the Church on the faith of the
apostles.

They went back to the Bible and reformed the Church to teach and act in accordance

with the apostolic message.

And they called the Church in every generation to keep reforming itself on that basis.

We are not to be stuck in 1560 in 2009. The Church of Scotland is supposed to be “reformed, but always reforming” – as it reapplies the apostles’ message in each generation.

Our life together, and our life as individuals, is to keep being reformed on the basis of what the Apostles tell us about Jesus and what God has done for us in him.

Martin Lloyd Jones put it like this

“the business of the church, and of preaching, is not to present us with new and interesting ideas, it is rather to go on reminding us of certain fundamental and eternal truths”

We have, like Peter, to go on repeating ourselves, until the truth of what God has done for you, and in you, is bored right down into your very being.

I am called, every Sunday, to be boring you.

But what is the message?

Well, it is the very things that Jesus taught the Apostles:
that he was God’s Son – over all things,
who lived and taught and demonstrated he was God;
that he died on a cross that they would be forgiven – and have a new life;
that he rose from the dead; that he sent his Spirit, and that some day he would come back to judge the world in his righteousness.

That’s what the apostles were teaching

But, and Peter knew it, it wasn’t the only thing that was being taught.

There were false teachers.

There were people undermining the apostolic teaching

People who hadn’t known Jesus

but who felt confident to offer their own opinions.

What were these?

Firstly, they were denying the return of Jesus.

They were denying that there would be a judgement.

Peter will say “nope, we were there, he definitely said he was coming back.”

Secondly, they were teaching liberty.

What the apostles were teaching was too narrow for them.

People needed to be free,

free to behave how they wanted,

free to have sex when they wanted,

free from rules and constraints and old-fashioned morality.

Peter will say “nope, I knew Jesus, that’s not what he was about.”

And, as I’ve said before, I’m so glad we don’t have false teaching like this in the Church of Scotland today. (Or do we?)

You see, there’s a choice, in what we believe about Jesus and the Christian faith.

Option one:

We can believe what the apostles tell us.

We can believe what the people who knew Jesus record that he was about.

Or, option two:

We can believe whatever we want to believe.

Now, option two is much more attractive

pick the teacher we want

listen to doctrine we want

think about Jesus in the way we want

believe in the morality that suits us

the only drawback is that it isn't true – and there's no good reason to believe it.

If truth doesn't bother you, fine. Believe what you want.

But here's what Peter says:

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty

So choose – believe the eye witnesses or believe those who just make clever stuff up in their heads.

You see, there are a whole load of ideas out there:

myths, folklore, fairytales, stuff that people want to believe but it has no basis in reality or in fact, and it has no reliable witnesses.

Let me give you some examples.

People say, when someone dies

“He's watching over me”

“Granny's gone to be an angel”

“Jeanie's a star in heaven”

“Awe, that's nice!”

Nice? Maybe

True? Nope.

They just made that up, there's no basis for it.

There's no testimony.

And then they'll call it Christian.

It's the arrogance that says: “never mind the what the apostles say in the Bible, here's what I think, it must be true because I like it. Oh, and Jesus would, naturally, agree with me.” – Rubbish.

Do you know what happen when someone dies?

If you don't, come to Adult Sunday School, because it is about time you did.

Other people say things like “at their root, all religions are the same?”

Sorry, no.

You might want to believe that, but it just isn't true.

Christians believe Jesus came down from heaven.

No other religion believes that of its leader.

Other religions might say, their leader saw into heaven, and had a message from God.

But Christianity teaches that God came down in Jesus.

That's not the same.

Islam could survive without Mohammad. Without the Buddha you've still got the ideas of Buddhism. If Marx hadn't existed, someone else would have thought up

Marxism. But Christianity without Christ is nothing.

That's not the same.

We teach Jesus is God incarnate;

Muslims deny it – Jews deny it;

Jehovah's Witnesses believe Jesus is the archangel Michael – a created being who became a man -

and Mormons believe that Jesus is the polygamist half-brother of Lucifer.

All religions are the same?

God incarnate versus the polygamist half-brother of Lucifer?

Sorry, not really the same, no definitely not.

But there are more myths out there:

The myth that of progress: that humanity is improving everything.

That because people say "this is a modern idea", it means it is a better one.

That modern morality is always better than "old morality"

That Western liberal ideas are always automatically superior.

Then the myth that sex, as long as it is loving, and as long as it is careful, has no long-term consequences.

That's not true. Not even a bit true.

Not medically true, not psychologically true, not spiritually true, not true at all.

But people want to believe it.

People base their value systems and their thinking on that.

Then there is the myth that abortion is just a medical procedure with no consequences.

It is just another choice to make.

That's quite convenient – but also quite nonsensical.

Or the myth that children won't suffer if both parents work long hours and child minders look after them constantly.

There are all sorts of so clever ideas, that people badly want to believe, because it fits in with their lifestyle,

but ultimately, it's just not true.

They say this is a scientific generation that don't believe things without proof?

Rubbish – this is the most gullible, irrational, deluded, crazy, credulous generation there has even been.

As G.K. Chesterton said "when people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing, they believe in anything"

You see if you want to believe something – you'll find someone to tell you that: a man in the pub, or an internet site – any idea that you care to think of, someone will teach it.

And if no one has said it before, that doesn't matter – be different – invent your own truth.

But the right question, is not "do I like this idea?" but

"what is the authority for saying that?"

"Where does it come from?"

"Do those supporting it have any clue what they are talking about?"

Peter says "we didn't follow clever myths, when we spoke of Jesus and his power and his coming, we were eyes witnesses"

“We know this is true, because we were there.
We saw it happen.
We heard the voice, when God said “that’s my Messiah””

“How do I know Jesus is God’s Son?
Well, the booming voice saying “this is my son” was a bit of a giveaway.”

“And we saw Moses and Elijah,
two Old Testament figures
confirming that the Old Testament prophecies are true as well.
Jesus is the one they point to.”

So, if you want to know about Jesus
Listen to the people who were there.
Listen to the eyes witnesses.

Read what we’ve recorded, because we should know.

Now, for us, that means we need to pay attention to the 27 books of the New Testament,
because this is the record of the eye witnesses – the people who were there.
All of the New Testament is either written by people who knew Jesus – or it is written by their close associates.

The New Testament was written between 50 and 100 AD - 20 to 70 years after the events.

Peter was there.
John was there.
James and Jude were there.

Luke wasn’t, but he tells us he spoke to the eye witnesses himself.

And Paul was a contemporary of Jesus – not a follower, indeed he hated Jesus.
But Paul says, I Corinthians 15,
“I passed on to you what I revived about Jesus’ death and Resurrection”
And then Paul gives a whole list of first hand witnesses – including 500 people who were alive at the time. “These people can back up what I’m saying.”

We can trust the New Testament.

From the earliest, the Church recognised certain writings as being Scripture.
They had to be written by the Apostles, or those close to them, and they had also to be consistent with apostolic faith of the Church.

Every so often someone comes up with the theory that Jesus was very different from, and said different things to, the Jesus that New Testament witnesses to.
The problem always is that the theories are based on later ideas, or later documents, and not on these earliest ones.

So who do we trust?

The answer is: the people who were there – and the teaching that stands on that foundation.

The apostles had nothing to gain by their teaching. They were persecuted, whipped, exiled and executed – and kept telling the same story, whilst most of those peddling modern version are getting six figure sums in sensationalist book deals.

You should always ask the question “what’s authority?”
“What’s the basis for the teaching that I’m hearing?”

“I might like what I hear, but is it true?”
“Is it what the witnesses in the Scripture say?”

One of the big ideas of Protestant preaching is that the preacher is accountable. I am called not to preach my own opinions, but to repeat the apostolic teaching of the Bible.

And you are entitled to challenge me and ask “where do you get that from?” “Show me where it says that?” “What’s your authority?”

One of the reasons that we are getting so much nonsense in modern pulpits is that congregations are so gullible.

They are so badly educated in the Biblical teaching that they are not equipped to hold the preacher to account, and so they end up swallowing stuff that they ought to spit out.

Paul writes:

“But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!” (Galatians 1:8)

Even if the preacher does look like an angel, if it isn’t the same gospel that the eyewitness apostles proclaimed – curse him.

So, read your Bibles.

Come to Adult Sunday School – and learn when to curse me.

Of course, it isn’t that we’d just learn stuff and know stuff and understand the Bible.

It is that we’d grow in knowledge, and in the ability to remember, and that knowledge would keep us knowing what God has done and who we are.

Peter had experienced being called by Jesus,
being taught by Jesus
being forgiving by Jesus
being commissioned by Jesus
and being given the power of the Holy Spirit to do all that Jesus wanted him to do.

He’d never forget.

But he told us at the start of this letter, that we stand on the same ground as him.

We are forgiven, just as much as him.

Christ died for us, as surely as he died for him.

He loves us, as much as he loves him.

He gives us his power – just as Peter received it.

And Peter wants us to know this,
so that we can live in the knowledge of Christ,
celebrating who we are in him,
and living who we are in him,
just as if we had been there, with the disciples, ourselves.

So keep being reminded of these things.

Amen