

Sermon 30th September 2009 (2nd Peter 3:14-18; John 21:15-19) “Grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus”

Scholars refer to 2nd Peter as being in the literary form of a “testament letter”.

That means it is written as the final words of an old man given to his followers at the end of his life. Peter is passing on his final warnings and teaching.

But remember what a life this was.

He was chosen by Jesus himself.

For three years he attended the best new communicants class there ever was.

He was there at the crucifixion.

He was there that first Easter.

He was there on the day of Pentecost.

Jesus himself ordained him to be a preacher, told him to “feed the sheep” and appointed him to lead the church.

Jesus made him the highest spiritual authority on the earth.

Maybe not infallible, but still pretty good.

And now he’s dying.

He’s an old man, writing his final letter.

He’s imparting to us all the wisdom of all his lifetime and experience.

And if you remember back six weeks to when we started this letter, you’ll remember it started in a remarkable way.

1.1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ: 2May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Peter began by saying to us that we have received a faith “as precious”, or literally “on the same ground, of the same standing” as the apostles.

We noted that that one statement should blow our minds.

We stand before God, in Jesus, in the same place the apostles stood.

You have been chosen – just as they were chosen.

You have been called by name – just as they were called by Galilee.

You have been forgiven – just as they were forgiven.

Jesus died for your sins, just as he died for theirs.

The same Holy Spirit that was poured out on them is yours.

“May grace and peace be yours”

Grace and peace are yours, in this knowledge:

the knowledge that you have been given this salvation – just as the apostles were.

And grace means that it is something you did not deserve, freely given to you, because God loves you, has chosen you, and has made you his.

Today, Marlyn Helen and Jill will profess their faith.
And we will “confirm” them.
That means that we are confirming what Jesus has done for them:
that he has chosen them, called them, taken their sin, and made them his.

Now, Marlyn, Helen and Jill.
I’ve got to know you as we’ve met together.
And I really love you guys.
But I’m going to say this in love.
You do not deserve what God has done for you.
You really don’t.
You do not deserve it at all.
But then, none of us do.
And that’s grace –we get what we don’t deserve.

And so, Peter began this letter by reminding us of what God has done for us in Jesus.
And now, at the end of the letter, it is as if the old man calls us to his bedside.
He beckons us closer,
because the elderly apostle wants to whisper in our ears.
He wants to share a final word learned from a lifetime of following Jesus.
And so he whispers to us“Grow”

*¹⁸But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

“Grow, grow, grow” – these are the final words of the dying man.

Now, there are lots of instructions I could give to our new communicants this morning:

Pray

Give

Read

Love

behave

Work

Speak

Witness

Rest

Know,

but probably the best command to leave ringing in your ears is the one that Peter leaves us
with: Grow.

Grow in Jesus.

I love my kids. I love everything about them.
I delight in them and wouldn't want to change them for the world.

Except, every single thing I do for them is designed to see them *change* – to see them grow.

I feed them, I school them, I discipline them, I buy them a bike, all so that they will grow in the right way; so that they will develop body, mind and spirit.

And children always have an awareness that it is good to grow:
they say “when I'm older..” “when I'm taller..” “when I learn to drive..” “when I learn to read..”

It is a healthy aspiration to change, to grow, to develop.

This is because a child has the humility to know that they are not yet complete, not yet perfected, not yet, all-knowing.

Adults so often lack that humility.

We'd worry if a child decided to stop growing – to stop aspiring to develop.

We'd worry if they decided that they had grown enough, learned enough, matured enough, that they were complete and wanted to stop.

And yet, that's exactly what many Christians do.

They decide they are just where they want to be – and they stop aspiring to grow.

That lacks humility – indeed that's pride.

“Grow in Grace” says Peter.

Christian living starts and ends with God's grace to the undeserving.

God says:

“you deserve my wrath, but I give you my love”

“you deserve to be punished, but I give you my forgiveness”

“you deserve to be cast away from me, but I take you to me”

“at the cross, I take all your sin, and give you all the righteousness of my son”

Peter understood grace.

On the shore of Galilee, Jesus taught him grace.

He'd disowned and denied Jesus.

He was a loser, a failure, a traitor, a sinner.

But the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, shown on the cross was bigger – it would take the disaster that was Peter's life, and do something amazing in him.

That's grace – and every Christian knows it.

If you have never understood what a loser you are, and what a amazing saviour you have, if you've never felt totally unworthy, and totally forgiven, then you are not a Christian, and you need to repent.

Peter says

“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”

The grace I knew at Galilee,
the grace I’ve known every day of my life,
grow in that grace, may it be multiplied in your life.

But also says Peter, grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Be like a child, wide-eyed with wonder and eager to learn more, and to know more -
just like we disciples were as Jesus opened our eyes to his kingdom.

You see,
you have a lot to learn.
There’s a lot of stuff you don’t know yet.
There are a lot of things you’ve got wrong.
And the apostle whispers in your ears “be teachable”.

Many of you here today think that you know it all.
I mean, you acknowledge that there are facts about the Bible and about theology that you
don’t know.
But you have decided in your hearts that these things you don’t know are not important.
You think you know everything you need to know to live your life.
You think you know everything you need to know to work out right and wrong.
You are amazingly confident that the way you look at the world is the right way.
You think your priorities are roughly good priorities.
And you are very proud.

But Christian growth starts with humility.
It starts with knowing that we don’t know.
Peter was about to lead the Church, he was about to become the top of the apostles, he
was about to become the greatest spiritual authority on earth, and Jesus taught him
humility.

I say again.
You are not as smart as you think you are.
You are not as wise as you think you are.
Your judgment is not as good as you think it is.
You are not as spiritual as you think you are.
Some of you believe things that you should not believe.
Some of you admire people that you should not admire.
Some of the advice you follow is foolishness.
And you need the humility that says “teach me”.

You need to say:

“I need to be taught”

“I need to hear sermons”

“I need to study my Bible”

“I need to read Christian books”

“I need corrected by Christian friends”

“because I get a lot of this wrong.”

Peter was taught for three years *by Jesus*

He saw the cross, the Resurrection, and he was chosen to be the leader of the Church and yet he remained teachable.

So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.

He was learning from Paul.

Now, Peter and Paul didn't always see eye to eye.

At one point Paul rebuked Peter publically, and told him, in front of all the other disciples that he was clearly in the wrong.

So Peter could have written Paul off

“Who does he think he is? I was a Christian longer than him. I was there with Jesus. I was put in charge. I was preaching sermons in Jerusalem when you were ... murdering Christians. Why would I have to listen to you?”

But Peter was still humbly willing to learn.

Notice a couple of interesting things here.

First, Peter equates Paul's letters with “the other *Scriptures*”

That's hugely remarkable.

Jews revered the Scriptures – the writings of Moses and the holy prophets.

And here is Peter placing Paul's letters up there with them.

People often say that the New Testament was a later invention of the Church, books chosen for later reasons, but here is Peter recognising that the apostles are writing Scripture.

Second, Peter says “Paul is hard to understand”

Well, tell us something we didn't know.

But that means that if we find bits of the New Testament difficult that we are in good company.

Indeed there many bits that I don't understand – and I have a PhD in Paul.
So, I'm so glad that Peter was scratching his head too at times.

Indeed the New Testament is full of hard things.

It tells us that there is only one Lord and saviour of the world, and that that's Jesus.

That's not easy.

It tells us that sex belongs only in marriage.

That's not easy.

It informs us about speaking in tongues, gender roles, eternal life, resurrection and baptism,
and there are not easy.

But that's OK.

We are to be teachable – not to be masters of all things.

We are to want to learn to grow in knowledge – not to suddenly be mature.

As long as you want to grow in your knowledge of God's word, then you do understand
what Peter is saying.

As long as we have the humility that says:

"I am here to learn, to be challenged, and to have my ideas changed and be corrected"
then we have got it.

But we need, as we've seen already, humility before the Scriptures.

The danger is always that we become like the false teachers in this letter.

That we bring our modern assumptions, our cultural values, the things we've learned from
this godless society and we end up judging the Bible, or twisting it to make it say what we've
already decided must be true.

And that comes from pride, the pride that says we have nothing to learn. We know best.

Behind it lies a chronological snobbery that says "our modern culture knows better than the
apostles" – rather than the humility that want to learn.

¹⁸*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Peter walked on water with Jesus

He heard him preach.

He saw him rise.

And he says "I want you to grow in your knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"

"Be teachable"

And then the last part of this letter: *To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.*
Amen.

That's a great note on which to end this series of sermons:

Glory be to Jesus.

May all praise and honour and worship be his.

What is the Christian life about?

What is all of life about?

It is not what I can do.

It is not what I can understand.

It is all about the glory of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is all about how amazing, how loving, how mind-blowing, how fantastic, how big, how true, how beyond our comprehension this Jesus is.

To him be all the glory:

glory in my life

glory in this church

glory in the world

glory in our study

glory in our living

glory in everything.

And when should this glory start?

Right now.

And may it go on to all eternity.

May it never stop

never be limited

never end

Amen, which means "yes, Lord. let it be so."

