

31/12/2021, 1 Peter 1:22-25, New Year's Eve - Pastor Fraser Pearce

Embedded in tonight's reading from 1 Peter

Is a quote from Isaiah 40.

It's a great quote to meditate on for New Year's Eve.

Here it is:

'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 endures for ever.'

Here the transience of human existence is contrasted

With the enduring character of God's word.

All flesh: all living things; all of us

We are like grass that looks verdant and full of life

But is withered up by one hot day;

We are like the flowers of the field

That are radiant in beauty,

But their beauty once displayed, falls in that very hour.

This is indeed how it is with us:

And the longer we live

The more New Year's Eves we have seen,

The more fleeting life seems.

When we were kids, at school, waiting for the Christmas holidays,

It seemed like they'd never come,

And the holidays, when they did come,

Seemed to go on and on in a glorious way.

But as we get older we wonder where all the time goes,

And the Christmasses and New Year's Eves and Easters

Blend into each other,

And we get a lived sense of how short life actually is.

This is, of course, commonplace sort of stuff,

And we don't need the bible to do anything but remind us

That life is short.

But that God's word *endures* – *that's* something that we need to hear:

And it's something that we need to hear

Not only to get a perspective for making the most of our time on earth,
And being prepared for the life to come,
As we have it in the prayers of our funeral rite.

It's also something that we need to hear
So that we find nourishment and sustenance
In our life as a community:
As brothers and sisters in the household of God.
It's something we need to hear
So that in this fleeting life we put our hope
For the sort of life that does not wither or fade
Not in our own wisdom or insight,
But in the word of God,
In the Good News about Jesus Christ.

Listen to how the reading begins: **Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.**

The first image here is that of cleansing:
Just as we can take a bath to wash ourselves physically,
So we can cleanse ourselves spiritually.
St Peter says that we have done this *by our obedience to the truth*.
It's likely here that St Peter has in mind that cleansing
That marks the beginning of our Christian life,
And that St Peter goes on to speak of explicitly later in the letter:
The cleansing of Holy Baptism.

That *God's word* that has the power to purify us,
Is a prominent theme of the Scriptures.
We get this imagery, for example, in John's Gospel,
Where Jesus says that it is his word prunes us or purifies us.
It's also part of our tradition as Lutheran Christians,
So in our confirmation rite we have this question put to the candidates:
Since you are God's children through Holy Baptism, do you intend to listen to the preaching of God's word, and to receive the supper of our Lord?
This central question of confirmation is an acknowledgment
That it is God's word that cleanses us, that keeps us in faith,
And that keeps us *fruitful* in faith.

In fact it's this fruitfulness in faith that St Peter focuses on:

Again, listen to what he says: **Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.**

St Peter here draws the connection between God's purifying word,
And the freedom that we have to love each other.

St Peter is here talking about the sort of love that is not play acting,
But that is real: the sort of love that shows itself in deeds
Not only when other people are watching,
But especially when no one but God is watching:

The sort of love that shows itself in how we think of others,
When no one knows our thoughts but God.
How we pray for them,
When no one hears our prayers but God.
How we speak about them,
When they are not there to hear how we speak.
How we help them in need,
When no one sees us help them,
And when they themselves might be unaware of the help we give.

St Peter is talking about the sort of love that shows itself
In how we forgive and ask for forgiveness,
From our hearts, with our brother or sister alone.
And that shows itself in how we ask for help when we are in need.
St Peter is encouraging us to show this sort of love
Not only with those in the church whom we like:

The people of our own way of thinking or social class
Or ethnic background, *but with the whole household of God.*

He puts it this way: **You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.**

We have a birth, St Peter is saying,
That is not an earthly, fleshly birth,
That is based on worldly preferences alone.
And not a birth that ends in death after a fleeting life.

We have a birth that is fathered by God,
And that means we have brothers and sisters fathered by God,
Brothers and sisters of different backgrounds and outlooks,
With whom we are joined in the one household of faith.

It's in getting us to think about the enduring character
Of the household of God,
Of our own status as God's children,
And the call we have to love each other
That St Peter then quotes from Isaiah:

For

**'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 endures for ever.'**

It's God's enduring word that gives us a new status in a new household.
And it's then that St Peter specifies what the word of the Lord is:

That word is the good news that was announced to you.

The Good News that in Christ Jesus
That we are freed from slavery to sin,
And can now live the life of love.
The Good News that our debt with God is cancelled,
That our impurity is cleansed,
That we are declared not guilty before God,
And can live as his innocent people.

Our doubts, our fears, our bitterness,
Our hatreds and betrayals and arrogance,
All these very human things do not last,
They are like grass, like the flower of grass.
But God's word, the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
Endures forever.

So let us put our hope in our Lord Jesus Christ,
In his love for us,
And in the cleansing power of his word,
So that we may love each other with a genuine love,
And so that this fruit of love may last
In this fleeting world,
And so that in our life together
That light of God's love may be seen,
And so that God's name may be glorified among us.
In Jesus' name. Amen.