

Sunday 4th July 2021

1 Peter 5:1-11 (Be glorified)

Talk by Russell Jones, Prayers by Kemi Ogundipe

Good morning. Welcome to today's service. We have come to the end of our series on 1st Peter and today we'll hear Peter's closing encouragements, warning, promises and blessing. To begin, two verses, one from today's passage, by Peter, and one from Romans 8, by Paul.

The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered for a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

We love God, don't we? So we can trust that he works for our good, and that suffering will end in strength and glory.

Now Kemi will lead us in our intercessions.

Intercessions

Let us pray to our father.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, and the union of Christ, we pray for people everywhere, close to us, and far away and so we pray for world Christian Churches, that its message of hope and salvation through Jesus Christ is preached with boldness and clarity, we remember every leader, that the Holy Spirit will provide guidance for them and help them to be more like you and for all members in our parish ministry team, we pray for your strength, guidance and blessing on their work as we build a church community that welcomes visitors and strangers and provide a safe place for those who feel unsafe or alone.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Everlasting God, we pray for healing among nations, for fair shares of the coronavirus vaccines, for food where there is hunger, for freedom where there is opposition, for joy where there is pain, that your love may bring peace to all your people, we pray that the leaders of all nations will work together to meet the challenges facing our world, we pray that people in this country will continue to do what is right to reduce the risk of coronavirus spreading widely and having adverse effect on the NHS.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, we pray for all offenders in prison that on release they will not re-offend but find support to start a new life, we pray for all who are vulnerable and unable to cope with demands of life for alcoholics, drug addicts and all who are sick in mind, we ask for proper compassionate for them.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Father God, we pray for our CAP centre that people throughout Penge community will be aware of CAP's work and feel inspired to support by volunteering and clients with health, relationship or other problems are given the strength to manage their situations with the help of other agencies. We ask that the Holy Spirit to lead and strengthen Rachael, Lynn and Gareth as they help their clients out of debt.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Faithful God, your generous love supplies us with all that we need, we know that all that we have is yours. We thank you for the work that you have done in our church through foodbank by the means of generous support of many people, we pray for your blessings on all those who give and receive, help the food to get to those who need it most.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Merciful father, we pray for those in need in our families and community, thinking of the elderly, the housebound and those in care homes, hospital and hospice and those undergoing treatment or waiting the result of tests we also pray for those who care for them and all who bring both material and spiritual comfort at times of need.

Let us take a moment of silence to bring those in need at this time to prayer as we name them in our hearts and commit them to Christ loving care.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Merciful father, we pray for those who have died, due to coronavirus and other illness, and those who have reached the natural end of a long life, we think of those we have loved, but see no longer, who live on in our memories, loving God, be with all who mourn and surround them with your love, that they may not be overwhelmed by their loss, but have confidence in your goodness and strength to meet the days to come.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

A prayer in search for a new Bishop of Rochester written by the Rochester diocese. Bishop James Langstaff has retired, and a farewell and thanksgiving for his service and ministry was held yesterday at the Rochester Cathedral.

"Father eternal, enlighten the minds of your faithful people, as we discern your will for a new bishop of Rochester, give us ears listening to your promptings, hearts open to the needs of our communities and spirits that seek the flourishing of your whole church, guide by your Holy Spirit those involved in this process and may we all continue to respond to the call to build your kingdom, we ask this through him who is our King and our friend your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. We praise you for all you have done in the past, we look forward with thankfulness for all you will do in the future and thank you for today and always."

Merciful father accepts these prayers for the sake of your son our saviour Jesus Christ.

In unity we say together the prayer our saviour Jesus Christ taught us.

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Reading (1 Peter 5)

⁵ To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

⁵ In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because,

'God opposes the proud
but shows favour to the humble.'^[a]

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Final greetings

¹² With the help of Silas,^[b] whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

¹³ She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. ¹⁴ Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

This is the Word of the Lord – **thanks be to God.**

Sermon

This chapter speaks directly to different members of the church, starting with his fellow-elders and then moving on to younger people. Peter had been the leader of the disciples and he was now leading a local church. He offers advice and encouragement here, in an open letter to many churches, during a time of persecution but also growth. From this passage we can learn about how to live as Christians, and how to act as church members. It echoes the opening of the book, with the emphasis on 'the crown of glory that will never fade', and especially in the way there is something very personal about Peter's words. He makes all kinds of references to particular experiences that he had undergone, which were described in the gospels – they were personal to him but his words can feel personal to us as well, so I hope they can reach into our hearts and minds as well.

He writes 'to the elders among you' but don't think 'It's not about me because I'm not old, and I'm not on the PCC', because we are all leaders who set an example of Christian living, whether in church, in our families, at work, or among friends, and we all share in the great hope that Peter reminds us of three times: 'the glory to be revealed...you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade' and 'God called you to his eternal glory'. He had seen the transfiguration of Jesus and knew that we have been invited into God's presence too.

'Be shepherds of God's flock' he tells us in verse 2, again echoing his personal experience when he was told three times by the risen Christ to 'feed my sheep', which doesn't mean only 'teach them' but more fully 'care for them'. His essential message about shepherding is to care for others, not ourselves, and to do so eagerly. Everyone has a role in a church family, and shepherds care for their flock, guard them, look ahead and move forward to new pastures. We should all care for each other, and when we do, we will be serving God.

Paul advised Timothy when he began his role as church leader to 'be diligent so that everyone may see your progress'. Timothy and Paul were pioneers, and you may have experienced how, when a church leader won't move forward, the church will not move forward either. For example, there was a local vicar who repeatedly cycled through two years' worth of the same sermons and assumed no one would notice. Or you hear of ones who only look at, or refer to, the same books of the Bible. What happens then is that God permits trials to appear that force the church to progress. Peter had learned this. For example, he didn't want Jesus to wash his feet and argued about it. He had learned to be both 'over' and 'among' his fellow believers, 'not lording it over but being examples' as he puts it here. When Jesus had put on a towel to wash his disciples' feet at the Last Supper, he had 'clothed himself with humility', as Peter puts it here, when he donned the garment of a servant.

Peter quotes a proverb in verse 6 that sums up what is sometimes called 'God's moral rule' – he opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Pride is the first sin because it is a desire to take control, to take over from God. The cure for it is to yield to God, and the evidence that you have done so is the grace of God operating in our lives. This will appear clearly when we trust God to direct our lives, and He uses us to work out His purposes, though it isn't always easy to see that happening as we are submerged in daily activity, so we need to try to recognise God's grace at work, the gift of his presence and support. Quiet time, Bible reading, prayer, and keeping a God-focus even among our busy-ness, as far as we can – these are all things that will help.

When we submit to God, that is 'being humble', we receive grace, and we will submit to each other so that we can serve. Don't fear someone taking advantage of you when you are operating under God's mighty hand, and you won't even dream of taking advantage of someone else when you are doing His will.

There may be difficulties along the way, the thorn in the flesh, but this is why Peter assures us 'Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time' (in verse 6). The final phrase 'in due time' is important because the willingness to wait seems to be part of the humbling. God exalts someone when they are ready for it, when they have become dependent on him. Moses was 80, after waiting 40 years from the time when he first tried to become a leader and defender of the Jewish people; Joseph was a slave and a prisoner for at least 13 years before he rose to power in Egypt. We have to be patient, and I suppose we have all had lots of practice at that in the last year, but we can hope and trust in what lies ahead.

There is though a great promise attached to this time of patience, this humbling through suffering described in verses 5 and 6, and it is seen in verse 7: 'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you'. If we do act as verses 5 and 6 tell us, then we receive the benefit – God will take care of us. When times are hard, we can become anxious and miss God's blessing. Notice that Peter wrote 'Cast all your anxiety on him'. If we keep part of our worries to ourselves, then that part of our worries can become part of everyday life, as if it is normal. We end up looking for worries, as if life isn't fulfilled without it. 'That worry has passed by – now where's the next one?' Instead, we have to keep God's inward peace so that we can face trials, be witnesses who are different to the frantic world, and receive the promised glory. To get close to this, we have to cast all our cares on him; don't let little cares turn into big problems.

In the gospels we read how Peter saw God care for him in things great and small. Jesus healed his mother-in-law, gave him a huge catch of fish, paid his temple tax, empowered him to walk on water, healed the damage he had done to the high priest's servant's ear, and later God even threw open the prison doors and released him. When we entrust our cares to God, he promises to help us in several ways. He will strengthen us. Here is a promise delivered by Isaiah; 'Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand'.

God holds us up as we walk in the right way; another way he helps is described by James: 'If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault'. As well as strength and wisdom to help us cope, he gives us the faith to trust him: 'Resist the devil, standing firm in your faith'. The devil is a shadowy figure in the Bible, making very few appearances, but he consistently does the same thing – he asks whether we want to really trust God. As the ancient proverb says, I see the better path, and approve of it, but I follow the worse. When I think 'I know what's best for me, even if it doesn't seem Christ-like', that's my mind's devil speaking, challenging my self-control. He 'prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour' says Peter, but notice that a lion doesn't roar when it prowls. It sneaks through long grass, hidden, waiting. It is just out of sight, corner of the eye stuff. The devil is a great scapegoat for our own failings.

We can't do everything in our own strength; nor can we let God do everything; he will work in us as well as work for us, so we have to welcome his Spirit and allow him to sustain us and use us.

It can be hard to be self-controlled when things go wrong, but Peter advises us to do so in verse 8, and to 'be alert'. He had failed in Gethsemane when he was asked to watch and pray, and he knew the pain of not resisting evil in faith. He tried to lie his way through after Jesus' arrest, saying 'I don't know the man!' These temptations to find our own way, to discuss and compromise with evil, are universal and shared by 'your brothers through the world'. We must resist, but how? The same way that Jesus resisted in the desert, in Luke 4, when he tested tempting lies against the Word of God.

We're very different as individuals, but there is a picture here of what God looks for in a Christian: 'he will himself restore you, and make you strong, firm and steadfast'. Peter assures us that God will replace our transitory troubles, 'after you have suffered a little while', with 'his eternal glory in Christ', reminding us that God is in control of difficult trials, but these lead to hope.

A humble heart is a heart that is established in God, firmly fixed, and not shifted by persecution or led away by false teaching. The strength promised to a humble heart empowers us to act, based on settled faith. We have great hope. We can cast all our worries onto our Saviour. Then, verse 12, we can receive 'the true grace of God' and follow Peter's instruction to 'Stand fast in it'. Christ has died for us; he has washed us clean; he has saved us for glory – stand fast in it.

There's a lot in this book about Christians growing in hope when facing sufferings, becoming more Christ-like as we are refined in the fiery trials, and saved for glory. The very last verse commends church members to greet each other with a kiss of love. That's the practice of men kissing men and women kissing women when they meet, still seen in many parts of the world, and it's great to think of masters and slaves doing that in the early churches, with elders who were both 'over and among' the congregation. The final blessing isn't one that conveys 'grace' this time, but 'peace to all of you who are in Christ' because, having written about how every believer is promised grace, there's a wish for every believer to experience the peace that comes from that. Be hopeful; receive God's grace; live in God's peace.

A final blessing

Almighty God,
by your command time runs its course;
forgive our impatience,
perfect our faith,
and, while we wait for the fulfilment of your promises,
grant us to have a good hope because of your word;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Please have a wonderful and godly week.