

Born Again

In case any should forget let me remind you all that we are still in the season of Easter, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Hallelujah. And in our reading from 1Peter this morning we are reminded what this means to us.

We so often tend to put people into pigeon holes. Thomas is doubting, Judas is the betrayer and peter, well peter is brash but he is also the one who denied Jesus. But when I read today's bible passage from 1 Peter I find a different Peter, I find a Peter who is excited and expectant.

Peter wrote, "It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. (1Peter 1:3 NLT). What a privilege, what a joy, what an undeserved gift from God. We have been born again,

We live in a sad world, a world full of sin, a world full of hate, a world full of pain and suffering, and once we were part of that world. We knew the pain, we lived in sin, and because of that we were destined to die.

Paul wrote that the wages of sin is death, and that is pretty definite and pretty definitive. But no longer, we still deserve death, we still deserve hell, but because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, because God raised Jesus from the dead, we have been born again, we have been made anew, we have been given a second chance.

Let's stop for a moment and try and think about what this means. Can anyone remember when they were born the first time? No? Well you were all there when it happened. Ok you've all got short memories and the younger you are the shorter your memory is.

Let's try and imagine what we might have thought on that day if we had been aware. As we opened our eyes and looked out at this marvellous world that God has made, as we looked around and recognised the privilege of life, as we looked at our mother who had just suffered the pain of childbirth to bring us here. If we had been blessed with awareness, what would we have felt?

I suspect we would have had a sense of awe and wonder, a sense of gratitude, but above all I would think a sense of expectation, a sense of what next? A moment ago I was in a relatively dark place, engulfed in fluid, encumbered by it and the restriction of the womb, not really having full freedom of movement.

And now, there is light all around, colours, I can move, I can scream, this is fun, what next? What can I not do now, what can I not accomplish? The world is at my feet and there are no limits to the possibilities it holds. Wow,

Can you imagine being aware at that moment? Can you imagine the excitement, the expectation? We didn't know about pain yet, we hadn't discovered sorrow or disappointment, we weren't even aware of sin and its effects and consequences. All we really knew was that a moment ago we were in darkness and could hardly move, and now we were in the light and could move every part of our body, wow.

Well, sad as it is, we can't remember that birth, we can't recapture that moment, but now Peter says we have been born again, we've got a second chance.

Our God is a God of second chances, and third chances and fourth chances, and if he told his disciples to forgive seventy times seven, he is not going to forgive us any less. But this first second chance, this time when we are born again, this is special, this is the big one, we have been born again, and in a sense it is like the first birth.

We were in darkness and now we burst forth into light, we were encumbered by sin and its consequences, weighed down so we could hardly move, and now it's all been taken off our shoulders, we're free.

Can you remember that moment, the moment when you were born again? Can you remember that moment when you realised that something new, something exciting, something extra-ordinary had happened? We often sing, 'there must be more than this', can you remember the moment when that hope, that expectation, became reality?

I can remember the moment I was born again; there weren't many people about, only the person who led me to the Lord, Jesus and me. We were living in a boat at the time, and I can remember the feeling the boards on my knees as I knelt down.

I hope you can also remember. I hope you can remember the wonder, I hope you can remember the joy, I hope you can remember the freedom, I hope you can remember the peace.

And I don't know if you will have noticed how good the analogy is, when we were in the womb, if we had been aware of our surrounding, if we had been able to see, we would have seen, as it were, through a red haze. A red haze created by light filtering through the fluid around us, the blood lining of the womb, our mother's flesh and skin. And then when we burst out, suddenly all those filters are gone, and we can experience the light in all its fullness.

And spiritually, when we were in the world, we could also see the light through a red haze. A red haze caused by the dancing flames of hell fire, a red haze caused by the sin in our lives, a red haze caused by all our hang-ups and pain. And then suddenly, at that moment of realisation, at that moment of acceptance, when we burst through the veil, we saw light in its fullness, we saw the purity of God, we saw the fullness of His love and His grace, we attained to that state that John Wesley referred to as Christian perfection.

For a moment, for a fleeting moment we were there, and then like Peter when he walked on the water, we looked away and began to flounder, but we have experienced it and nothing and no one can take that away from us, and with the experience comes the knowledge and the realisation that it is possible.

And Peter goes on to tell us "Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. (1Peter 1:3-4 NLT)

Like I said, if we had been aware at our first birth, I'm sure there would have been that air of expectation. Do you get excited when you get something new, a new toy, a new computer, a new car, a new guitar, a new dog, we get excited. Can you imagine the excitement of the newness of life and Peter says, the new birth is no different, "we live with great expectation because we have a priceless inheritance".

In the first birth we had the world at our feet, the whole of our lives to look forward to. In the new birth we have the whole of creation at our feet, and eternity to look forward to, no wonder Peter is excited, it is exciting.

But of course everything is not rosy, because we are still in the world, we are still subject to its pain and suffering and we still have the sinful nature in us.

We are all different and we all have different experiences of life, so I don't know when you first became aware of pain, I don't know when I first became aware of pain. I do have a distinct recollection of when I first became aware of bleeding. I was going through my grandfather's drawer, which I had no business to be in, and I found a blade, you know one of these that have a thick spine and used to come in a cardboard sleeve.

I'd never seen one before so I decided to take it out and play with it and feel it, and suddenly there was all this red stuff pouring out of my finger, and I remember how frightened I was because I had no idea what was going on. I started crying and my grandparents heard me crying and were soon there to reassure and bind my finger up.

Sometimes, after our new birth, we get into things we have no business to be in, we experiment with sin and we dabble in the things of the world, and we can get hurt and we can be frightened and just like my grandparent were there to re-assure me, so God is there to re-assure us.

Peter writes "and through your faith God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. (1 Peter 1:5 NLT)

God is protecting us, that doesn't mean we have permission to go rummaging through drawers we have no business to be in, that doesn't mean we can dabble with sin, but God knows we will, because we still have our sinful nature, and when we do, when we get hurt, when we are frightened, because of our faith God is protecting, that's awesome, which is why Peter can say, "So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while.(1 Peter 1:6 NLT)

Peter says you're going to get hurt, sometimes you'll bring it upon yourself, and sometimes it will happen because that's the way the world is. Don't worry Peter says, never mind, be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead and these trials will test your faith, because through them and in them, because of your faith, you will know the protection of God

I don't know if Peter might have been remembering Thomas when he wrote, "You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. " (1Peter 1:8 NLT)

Peter is almost certainly remembering the words of Jesus, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me." (John 20:29 NLT)

The reality is that though we have not seen Him, we have felt Him, we have experience Him, we have known His new birth, and we can do no less than love Him who loved us to death.

So today rejoice in your new birth. Rejoice in your inheritance, and live with great expectation of the great things that God is still going to do in your life.