

## Third Sunday of Easter

April 26, 2020

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**1 Peter 1:17-21** Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. 18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. 21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

### "Strange Life of Faith"

There is definitely one person who is benefitting during this pandemic. Sorry, I didn't intend to make that sound like I was launching into some conspiracy theory. Before this all started, Amazon controlled nearly 40 percent of all e-commerce in the United States. Since people have been stuck inside their homes and become more cautious of going to brick and mortar stores, Amazon has made billions of dollars. That's a conservative estimate. But maybe you didn't know that Amazon's founder and owner, Jeff Bezos, is really driven by something beyond commerce and Alexa and cloud storage. At his high school graduation in 1982 "He dreamed aloud of the day when millions of his fellow earthlings would relocate to colonies in space."<sup>1</sup> He is passionately driven because he firmly believes there will come a time when our planet's energy demands will outstrip its supply. We will have to go to space to save earth.

It only sounds crazy, well, because it sounds like science fiction. Save earth by going to space. Save humanity by colonizing another planet or maybe the moon. That's the plot of lots of great books and movies and TV shows. The biggest difference, I think, is that Jeff Bezos just might have the resources and the drive to make it happen. Or at least give it a realistic try.

Living in space would be pretty strange. But there is actually a stranger life right here on earth. When we started exploring Peter's first epistle, we learn of his praise that takes shape in joyful faith. Now he is nudging us to understand how strange this kind of existence is for believers. Actually, his encouragement is more extreme. He wants us to consider this life here on earth our alien residency. This isn't our true home. We shouldn't feel totally at ease. To go along with the flow and just handle life most naturally will lead to a futile kind of life. Peter shows us the strange life comes from a fertile and valuable and hopeful life. That kind of life is rooted in knowing we are children of God. It is powered by understanding the immense value given to us by the sacrifice of Jesus. And it is propelled

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<sup>1</sup> Foer, Franklin. "Jeff Bezos's Master Plan." The Atlantic, November 2019 Issue. Accessed: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/11/what-jeff-bezos-wants/598363/>

forward by a hope that rests in God himself. It might feel strange. But it is the gloriously strange life of faith God gives his people.

Before we can talk about what is strange, we have to have a better understanding of what is normal. Right now that can be really tricky. We are all talking about trying to get back to normal. We wonder when or even if things will get back to normal. But the more people I talk to, the more I realize, we are probably expect normal will be different in the near future. We are bracing for a new normal. And we don't even know what that looks like.

Peter tells God's people that we should not settle for normal when it comes to our spiritual lives. He says: **"Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear."** (1 Peter 1:17) You know you have a relationship with God. We have a relationship with him in which we call on God and draw near to him in prayer. It's because we have that relationship with God and because we know ultimately we will have to stand before him that we have unusual way of conduct and behavior. We can consider ourselves as aliens or foreigners in this world. We are on a journey, but this is not our final destination.

Think of this time here as your alien residency. You won't be here permanently. So some things about life here should feel strange, not normal to you. Our society simply accepts as normal or natural some things that should be awkward and uncomfortable for Christians. Giving in to overindulgence and drunkenness, losing hope and self-medicating with shopping or entertainment, we should not be comfortable with those kind of things. Society tells us divorce is unavoidable. Living together before marriage is normal. Abortion is a right. Natural and easy for human beings is detestable to our God in those cases. Who you are matters more than what everyone else thinks. You are a child of your heavenly Father. This world and its attitudes toward the way to live your life will always feel strange when you think first about your relationship with your Father first.

This is why we need to think of our life here as an alien residency: **"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors."** (1 Peter 1:18) It's a strange life first of all because it needs to be different than the way of life handed down to you. Peter says that is an empty way of life. It's not empty because you don't fill your life. You can be busy and occupied, seeking to find yourself or working to please others, but it won't end up where you want to go. It's a futile way of life. That sounds harsh. But it's true. A futile life is any way of conducting yourself that doesn't bring you closer to God; any way that might actually lead you farther away from God.

When it comes down to it, there are basically two basic approaches to life. There is the approach that tries to prove to God you don't need him and you want to be in control of your life. Then there is the approach that tries to be good enough for God based on your performance. In the context of the way of life handed down from your ancestors, this approach remembers that your parents taught you to be respectful to others and work hard. Live in such a way that you would want everyone else around you to act. Treat people the way you want to be treated. You feel secure in this way because it is rooted in the

wisdom of your elders. It feels safe because you are sticking with a well-established plan. The other approach says you don't need anyone telling you what to do. You need to live your own life. You need to let your heart be your guide. You need to make your own rules and explore for yourself what is your truth. You need to be true to yourself and not let small-minded people try to put their expectations on you.

For Peter's original audience, scholars today are wondering if the way of life passed down by ancestors means he's writing to a primarily Jewish audience or Gentile audience. But it works for both. Judaism shifted from an emphasis on the Bible and focused mainly on the traditions of the rabbis. Human traditions and opinions become more important. Demands of holiness and performance dominated so eventually there was less focus on a need for God's mercy and promised Messiah. Greek culture figured that destiny was determined by the fates. You just need to go out and get what you want out of life. You could substitute it for how your grandparents view life compared with your kids or how people back home see things versus people here or even out on the ranch in contrast to the city. But the main thing Peter wants us to see is both approaches are a futile way of life.

Here's what I mean. It's easy for teachers to get frustrated. They feel the pressure to get their students to make progress. Sometimes that doesn't take into consideration who those students are and what they are going through personally. So those personal issues preventing students from achieving certain standards cause frustration for teachers because it reflects poorly on his performance. Then he puts more pressure on them. The kids sense that frustration and develop poor attitudes and bad behaviors. It's a vicious cycle. When God's people get so focused on ourselves, it becomes a vicious cycle. We focus on doing what we want or what we think is expected of us, we get frustrated. We put more pressure on ourselves. We develop poor attitudes and our performance suffers. The good news Peter tells us is **"you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors."** (1 Peter 1:18) You were redeemed from this futile, dead-end kind of life.

Jesus is the one who breaks this vicious cycle of failure to perform. Peter tells God's people you are freed from all this. You have someone who meets you where you are. You have someone who puts you where you need to be instead of putting pressure on you to do better. Your redemption comes **"with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."** (1 Peter 1:19) Following any other way of life is so dangerous. Dead end lives lead to entrapment in helpless hostage situations in which we need to be rescued. Jesus is the lamb who frees you from this predicament.

Jesus didn't live a futile way of life. He didn't follow the traditions and collective wisdom of his elders to focus on their sense of propriety. He didn't follow his own heart to find his own way through life. The life of Jesus was valuable because he lived flawlessly in obedience to his Father's will. The life of Jesus was fertile because it was lived to rescue sinful humanity. The life of Jesus was filled with hope because his blood shed on the cross was the only rescue for souls trapped in the futility of their own thinking.

The first key to living the strange life of faith is to know who you are as a child of God. The second key is to comprehend how strange it is that this life has been given to you by Jesus. Jesus has paid the ransom price to liberate you from a futile way of life. Jesus gave up his life for yours to give you this strange life. God's strange work is the destruction of all your ideas of fairness and justice, wisdom and strength. God's proper work restores you to a proper relationship with him based on righteousness and wisdom and power. But it is the righteousness of Jesus. It is the destruction of your stress of trying to be what you are supposed to be by your own efforts. It is the destruction of your anxiety over whether following your heart will take you where you really want to go. The strange life of grace takes the focus off yourself and puts it onto Jesus.

There's a reason why a moon shot is called a moon shot. It's not easy. Jeff Bezos funds his passion project by selling \$1 billion in Amazon stock each year and investing it in another company called Blue Origin. Blue Origin researches and builds rockets, rovers, and other components that will allow space travel and possibly space colonization. But there are no guarantees that even with billions of dollars in funding Blue Origin will help Jeff Bezos achieve his dream.

For God's people the situation is entirely different. You know you are a child of God through faith in Jesus. You know you have freedom through the ransom accomplished by Jesus. And you know where you are going. Your strange life of faith is based on real, historical fact but also directed toward a certain future. Peter tells us that **"through [Jesus] you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."** (1 Peter 1:21) The rescue Jesus accomplished had been planned out before the foundations of the world were laid. Jesus made the Father's passion project a reality on Easter morning. And because God already did what was necessary to make you his own and give you a new life, you can place complete confidence in him. And so it is strange because your life is filled with hope. This hope is based on the resurrection and glorification of Jesus.

I wouldn't say I'm an expert on the science fiction genre. But so often those movies about space exploration leave you with mixed reactions. I love the stunning visual images. I love engaging the imagination about what things could be like. But the endings almost always leave me disappointed. Either aliens come and destroy the earth. Or humans revert to selfish behavior and sabotage ambitious space missions. And that's logical because so much out there is still unknown. The imagination of one artist will always leave someone else dissatisfied.

God's people have the benefit of knowing the end result of our strange lives of faith. We know our final destination will be at home with the Lord. Everything we have been given already by faith puts everything in perspective in this temporary stopping place. And it's not the fear of a horror story becoming reality in our lives. It's not some far-fetched fantasy removed from reality. We live in constant awe of the amazing love our heavenly Father has shown us and the blessings he gives us to conduct our lives outside the normal of our world. Our strange lives of faith are strange lives lived in certain hope. Amen.