

Confirm your calling

2 Peter 1

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The things you do and say when you have limited time really speak.

Imagine you had 2 weeks left to live.

How are you going to spend those 2 weeks?

Who will you want to catch up with and say goodbye?

What are you going to want to say to people?

What do you want them to remember after you are gone?

We begin a short series in 2 Peter today.

It's a letter written shortly before Peter died.

We know that because in 1:14,

he tells his readers that Jesus has made it clear to him,

that he will soon die.

OK that's pretty fair warning.

If Jesus tells Peter that his time is nearly up,

then what's he going to spend his time doing?

Now I'm guessing that if you had a short time left to live,

you'd be wanting to see people face to face.

It's the most personal way to say goodbye.

But we have some advantages over Peter.

People can drive or fly in to see you.

Or at least they could if there wasn't a pandemic on.

Even now they can Zoom you or phone you.

But in Peter's day, travel was long and arduous.

And phones didn't exist.

By the end of his life,

Peter was a long way from the fisherman in Galilee

who we meet in the gospels.

He was based in Rome.
And he been a leader of the church for 30 odd years.
Peter's death was sometime between 65-68AD.
Just over thirty years after Jesus' resurrection.
There were people all the way from Jerusalem to Rome
who he wanted to say goodbye to.
So what does he do?
He writes a letter.
This letter would have been not long before Peter's death.
Not unlike Paul in 2 Timothy.
In a letter you can lay down clearly the things that matter most to you.
A letter can still speak to future generations.
It's easy to forget what someone says to you.
I saw both my grandmothers before they died.
I couldn't tell you the details of the conversations I had with them.
It's easy enough to forget any conversation.
Let alone a conversation you have at an emotional time.
But a letter is written down.
You can look back on it.
And if the subject matter is important enough,
even people who weren't yet born when you wrote it can read it.
So Peter writes it down.

The key text in our reading,
that tells us Peter's reason for writing is 2 Peter 1:12-15.
"So I will always remind you of these things,
even though you know them
and are firmly established in the truth you now have.
I think it is right to refresh your memory
as long as I live in the tent of this body,
because I know that I will soon put it aside,
as our Lord Jesus has made clear to me.

And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things."

What Peter wants to do before he dies is to reinforce the message he's been preaching and record in hard copy it so it's available for the future. So as we read the rest of the letter, we can read it in that light.

This is what the apostle Peter wanted to remind the church of constantly. This is what the apostle Peter wanted to make sure was written down, so that you would have access to it.

OK what was it?

Well today's chapter comes in two parts.

It's sort of conveniently divided into the bit before his reason for writing and the bit after his reason for writing.

In the first bit, he's telling Christians what he wants them to do.

In the second bit, he's addressing the question of the source of authority in the church when he departs.

Or to put it very directly.

Part 1 - Here's what I want you to do.

Part 2 - Here's how you will know what to do when you don't have me around to ask.

So Part 1 - Here's what I want you to do.

What would you expect to find in this section?

In the circles that I've have lived literally my whole life in, you would expect to find,

"Preach the gospel.

Don't give up.

Never stop witnessing to your friends and family.

Pray for their salvation."

Now you can find stuff like that in 2 Timothy,

though it is directed at a preacher not a regular Christian.
But Peter's exhortation is a call to godly living.
We'll look at what he says in a moment.
But first, I want to explain why godly living
is so important in building God's kingdom.
There are many non believers out there
who have their view of the Christian faith
shaped by the bad behaviour of Christians.
I'm not talking just about paedophiles in the church,
though they certainly damage Christian witness immeasurably.
But even worse is the day to day poor behaviour of professing Christians.
When we gossip about our neighbours.
When we slander people whose politics we disagree with.
When we behave like we don't give a stuff about the poor.
When we treat the natural environment with disregard.
When we spread misinformation
because our suspicion of governments is so high
that we believe anything we read online without fact checking it.
When we are dishonest in business dealings.
When we are arrogant in the way we treat others.
Some people will respond to that behaviour
by saying 'I never want to become a Christian then.'
I'll tell you what kind of people will react to each type of behaviour.
If we gossip, then not only will the people who are gossiped about
not want to know about our faith,
but also the people who are careful to speak well of others
will disregard us also.
If we slander people whose politics we disagree with,
then people who disagree with our politics will disregard us.
If we don't care about the poor,
then the poor won't be interested to listen to what we have to say,
and neither will those who make it their mission to help the poor.

So for example the people who work for WPCS.
If we treat the natural environment with disregard,
then greenies won't listen to the gospel.
If we spread misinformation,
then doctors and professional people
whose job it is to get careful public messaging out
will disregard what we say.

they will think we love conspiracy theories.

Did you know that Christians are some of the most susceptible
members of the community to conspiracy theories?

Well I won't go on.

The point is, we can preach the gospel till we are blue in the face,
if people aren't listening to a word that comes out of our mouths,
it won't matter how persuasively we say it,
they won't hear it.

And that's why godliness is crucial to growing the kingdom of God.

So Peter addresses his letter to 1:1

'Those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ
have received a faith as precious as ours.'

That's telling us two things at least.

1. You received your faith.

You didn't earn it.

You weren't so smart you worked it out.

God gave it to you.

2. The faith he gave you is just as precious as the faith
he gave to the greatest of the twelve disciples, St Peter himself.

So you have this gift of faith,

what are you going to do with it?

Don't bury it in the ground and wait for the master to return.

No put it to work.

Make every effort to add to your faith, goodness.

That means the sort of character that actually wants to do the right thing.
The sort of person who when they find a wallet on the ground
and take it to the police station,
doesn't only leave the cash intact,
but hopes deep in their heart that the owner will come and claim it.
To goodness we add knowledge.
Knowledge is important for godliness.
It's not knowledge of astrophysics or how to change a car tyre.
It's knowledge of what kind of life pleases God.
It would be a bit of a waste of time
to put an amazing amount of effort into something trying to please God,
and then to find out that God wasn't actually
all that interested in what you were doing.
I'm reminded of the fifth century monk Simeon Stylites,
who spent 38 years living on top of a pole,
because he thought he could avoid sinning that way,
and so please God.
Admirable intention.
But it would have been good to add some knowledge to his goodness.

To knowledge add self control.
Once you know what pleases God,
you actually have to have to self control to live that way.
I can't resist sarcasm.
I know it's not godly.
But I lack the self control to do what pleases God.
I have been growing in this aspect of godliness.
I was far worse 30 years ago.
But I tried to give up sarcasm for Lent this year.
It wasn't a raging success.
I have the knowledge.
I just need to add self control to my knowledge.

And perseverance to self control.
It's one thing to struggle against sarcasm for Lent.
It's another thing to keep at it for life.

To perseverance add godliness.
A godly person is a person who gets excited by what makes God excited.
God is excited by justice and mercy.
God is excited by generosity and love.
We get excited by all manner of things.
Let's strive to be excited by what excites God.

To godliness add mutual affection.
Do you like your Christian brothers and sisters?
It's not hard to like your friends.
You choose them because you have things in common.
It is hard to like your church.
People gather together who are quite different.
People you may not normally choose to spend time with.
You can keep them at a distance,
by not really making an effort to get to know them.
Or you can ask God to make them grow on you.
God chose them to be your brothers and sisters.
You are going to spend eternity with them.
You might as well learn to like them.

To mutual affection add love.
It's one thing to like people.
It's another thing altogether
to be willing to sacrifice your own interests for theirs.
You know I have never had a person come up to me and say,
"I'm really not a fan of modern music,

I like the old hymns.

But I believe that we ought to inclining our services
to reach the generation that needs to hear the gospel for the first time.

Could you please put more modern music in our services?"

That would be love.

Sacrificing your own interests for others.

So that's part 1 of the chapter.

What does Peter want us to do?

The short answer is he wants us to grow in godliness.

Part 2 of the chapter is,

"Here's how you will know what to do,
when you don't have me around to ask."

What are the options?

Peter could say,

"Hey look, I'm not going to be around much longer.

But before I go,

I'm going to anoint a successor.

It will be like the kings of Israel,

except we will call them the princes of the church.

I will pour olive oil on the head of my anointed successor,
and before he dies,

he can anoint a successor for himself,

and by doing that,

we will make sure

there is anointed leadership for the church until Jesus returns."

He could have said that,

but he didn't.

Not that you'd know it from some denominational practice.

What else could he have said?

"Hey look, The Lord Jesus plucked me from a fishing boat.

I had no theological training.

But the Holy Spirit was poured out on me at Pentecost.
And God has used me to lead his church.
When I go, God will raise up a new leader for you.
He will be anointed with the Holy Spirit,
and will give convincing signs to you by the miracles he works.
Listen to him.
God will continue to raise up leaders like that
and speak to you through them until Jesus returns."
He could have said that.
But he didn't.
Not that you'd know it by some Christian practice.

What did Peter say?

1:15 "I will make every effort to see that after my departure
you will always be able to remember these things."

How did he do that?

By writing it down.

The replacement for the apostle Peter when he dies
is not a Spirit filled leader,
it is not an anointed successor.

It's the New Testament.

Why is Peter's testimony authoritative
in a way that future generations can never match?

1:16 "For we did not follow cleverly devised stories
when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power,
but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

Future generations may well be cleverer than Peter.

But none of them were eyewitnesses of Jesus' majesty.

1:17-18 "He received honour and glory from God the Father
when the voice came to him from the majestic glory,
saying, "This is my Son, whom I love;
with him I am well pleased."

We ourselves heard the voice from heaven
when we were with him on the sacred mountain."

Future generations may well be able to devise clever stories,
but they didn't hear the voice on the mountain.

That's why the words of the apostles recorded in the NT
speak to us with an authority that church leaders can never match.

But is there anything else we can rely on to guide us after Peter dies?
Yes there is.

There is the Old Testament Scriptures.

1:19 "We also have the prophetic message
as something completely reliable.

And you will do well to pay attention to it,
as to a light shining in a dark place,
until the day dawns
and the morning star rises in your hearts."

Are the words of the apostles recorded in the NT
the only guide for the church after Peter's departure?

No.

Sometimes you might think they were.

From the ages of 15-23, I went to an Anglican Church
that I could ride my bike to from the home where I grew up.

I stopped going there

when I moved down to Tasmania to work for Comalco.

In the 8 years that I went to that church,

I heard one sermon from the old Testament.

Would you call that paying attention to the prophetic message?

Hardly.

But maybe the OT was to guide the church

until the apostles wrote the NT and then the NT superseded the OT.

Well no.

You pay attention to it,

'Until the day dawns.'

What day is that?

The day when Jesus returns.

That's when we can stop paying attention to the OT.

When we don't need it anymore because we see Jesus face to face.

Why is the OT still relevant?

1:20-21 "You must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophets own interpretation of things.

For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

You want to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit?

Open the Old Testament and read it.

In a few short weeks we'll be doing that in our Holy Trinity services, as we begin our annual sermon series on an Old Testament book.

We'll be looking at Esther.

If you want a copy of a book to read on Esther, there are lots of copies available.

God will speak to you through the pages of Esther.

Why is it important to read the OT as well as the NT?

Well apart from the obvious point,

that Peter tells us in our reading that you will do well to pay attention to it, so if the writers of the NT tell you to pay attention to the OT, the you aren't paying attention to the NT if you ignore the OT.

But also, Jesus' words and the apostles' words in the NT are soaked in the OT.

You literally can't understand the NT without understanding the OT.

How do we know what to do when we don't have Peter around to ask?

We read the Bible,

Old and New Testaments are given to us by God.

The Old Testament was given to us by prophets carried along the but HS.
The NT was written for us by apostles
who were eyewitnesses to the majesty of Jesus.
And so we need to listen to them.

What does Peter want us to do?
He wants us to grow in godliness.
How will we know what to do?
Read the Bible.