

“God’s Word Endures, and in Christ, His Church Revives”

Wed. in the Octave of Misericordias Domini ✕

Text: I Peter 1:18-25

Wednesday in Eastertide, April 18th, A.D. 2018

Zion Evangelical Lutheran of Detroit, MI

I.N.I.

The closing words of today’s Epistle reading from I Peter Ch. 1 are frequently used at Evangelical Lutheran churches that have a New Year’s Eve Divine Service. And with those words come themes such as the one for this homily, theme.

As a young pastor several decades ago, I was reminded of this by my wise, older Bishop of the English District. He had taken me to a high hill above downtown Pittsburgh, overlooking the Monongahela River to the south and the site of a parking lot where once stood First St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church and School. It was there as a child that he had been baptized, catechized, confirmed, and went to church and the Christian day school. He said to me, *“Remember this: church buildings come and go, pastors come and go, districts and synods come and go. Only the Word of God remains forever.”* My Bishop back then was Rev. Dr. George Bornemann. Having been to dear George & Helen Bornemann’s grave in St. Luke’s Lutheran Cemetery in Oviedo, FL, many times, the Divinely-inspired words of the Apostle Peter have taken on special meaning for me, and as they do for each child of God who takes those sacred words to heart.

St. Peter understood that this world and everything in it, even beautiful houses of worship, are temporary. People pass away. Structures and the objects and things of this life crumble to dust. Peter quotes the prophet Isaiah, Ch. 40, a portion of Holy Scripture normally read during Advent: *“All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls (away)...”* (Vs. 24) In Peter’s and Isaiah’s words we have a comparison of human beings with grass. Winter snow and cold render grass and plants dead. But over the course of years, all plants, including perennials, and grass wither, fade, and died. The simple point being made here is that flesh, human life, is temporary. It is brief. Sinful humanity dies. Though marked with Christ in the waters of Holy Baptism, we have been tainted in this life with Adam’s original sin and our actual sins, and therefore we must face death, the penalty for our sins.

But still more serious is that life lived without God and His abiding Word is meaningless. It’s like what is pictured in Shakespeare’s classic words of his character Macbeth: *“Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day, to the last syllable of recorded time; and all our yesterdays have lighted fools, the way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more...”* That is life without God.

But there is another picture that Peter and Isaiah paint: *“The grass withers, and the flower falls (away), but the Word of the Lord remains/endures forever”* (Vs. 24b-25a). It is tempting to render pictures and scenes that seem to portray “forever,” such as the Rock of Gibraltar or a strong Michigan lighthouse on a rocky shoal, but even these are not “forever.” Even this earth is not “forever.”

The point of this portion of Holy Scripture is that God's abiding Word, unlike human life, endures forever.

Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Lord, is the eternal granite, the eternal Word of God made human, made flesh. He who laid down His life in death victoriously took it up again. In this Octave or week of Misericordias Domini, "the mercy of the Lord," Christians celebrate Christ's triumph over death and the grave. Because He lives, we who in faith look to Him will live forever. Death will not keep us anchored eternally in the grave. For Christ Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is and remains the Incarnate, eternal Word of the Father and our Redeemer.

And His inscripturated Word endures. His Word is permanent. Your life has something solid on which to rest when it is anchored on the Word of God. And that is what Peter means in saying that we are "*born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God*" (Vs. 23). The Holy Spirit works faith through the proclamation of the Gospel – in the Old Testament, in the preaching of the Apostles, in the New Testament, and above all, in Christ Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1:14). The Spirit of the living God works and strengthens faith in us daily through the hearing of that enduring Word of God and in the Holy Supper of our Lord's Body and Blood.

Peter adds: "*This Word is the Good News that was preached to you*" (Vs. 25). God's changeless will and His changeless Word are the one constant in this changing life. God's Law condemns sinners; His Gospel works faith and hope through Christ.

VDMA. We see those Latin letters in the Chancel of our house of worship. It is the Latin expression *Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum*, which translated is, "*The Word of the Lord endures forever.*" It is noteworthy that this Petrine passage, our text, was and is the motto of the Lutheran Reformation. Our Reformation fathers affirmed that God was willing to send His beloved Son, the unblemished Lamb of God, to be to be the sacrifice on the altar of the Cross for our sins. Through His enduring Word, which is centered in Christ Jesus, He calls us to life in His Church and sets us apart to His glory and to service to our neighbor. Christ revives His Church through His means of grace, His holy and enduring Word and Sacraments. May we then live under the mercy of God and witness to others of His redeeming love in Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd and Lord.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen