

1 Peter 1:17–25

Third Sunday of Easter (Series A)

Lessons for the Day: Acts 2:14a, 36–41; 1 Peter 1:17–25; Luke 24:13–35

When in Rome?

April 19, 2026

“And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

It is often said that it was St. Ambrose who coined the phrase, “When in Rome, do as the Romans”. It is thought that St. Ambrose advised St. Monica in the 300s AD that when in Rome, one should fast on Saturdays as the Romans did, rather than on Sundays as was custom in Milan. When you are in a new place, you should conform to the local way of doing things. Experience a different culture, different cuisine and a different way of life. It will give you the best understanding of life in that land and therefore give you a better understanding of the people, too.

It can be both educational and relaxing to enjoy a different lifestyle, even if only for a little while. Of course, there is another aspect to this, too. When you are in a foreign land, you are subject to the laws of that land. It is of no use to say that you are a Canadian, only familiar with Canadian law when you are travelling in a place like Saudi Arabia. You must ‘do as the natives do’ when it comes to the law.

In our text today, Peter tells us that we are away from our true, our heavenly home and we live as strangers and exiles here in this world. But this is one time when we want to be sure that we do not do as other do. In fact, we are called to be different. We are called to live as those who know what it is to be redeemed from the empty way of life that affects the people of this world. The joy of Easter is that we have life in Christ. But that life is also new life, the life that Paul talks about when he tells us: *“[Christ] died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”* (2 Corinthians 5:15, ESV)

In a few moments we will sing: *“I’m but a stranger here. Heaven is my home.”* (LSB 748) Truly, we need to remember this in the day to day course of our lives. In the strictest sense, we don’t belong here. Oh, by nature, as those born in this world, we are just like every other human being. We are all descendants of Adam and Eve, and plagued by the family curse. We are born into sin and doomed to the unavoidable consequences of that sinful life. In fact, Scripture looks at our ‘native’ state and declares: *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience”* (Ephesians 2:1–2, ESV)

When Peter talks about our life apart from Christ he calls it an empty way of life. Someone once created a small device which, when you turned it on, had a little hand come out of a trap door, reach down, turn off the switch, and then go back into hiding. That is an empty existence: a device which does nothing but turn itself off. Maybe our lives don’t seem quite that empty, but they amount to the same thing. People can throw themselves into their work, their sports, their education. They can be like Solomon, pursuing everything the world has to offer. And what was Solomon’s observation? *“I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.”*

(Ecclesiastes 1:13–14, ESV)

Is that the way we want to live? It is sad that many turn from the Word of the Lord, which is always relevant and essential and the only faithful guide for our lives, to follow the wisdom of the world or compromise with the world. And what has happened as a result? It often seems that Christians really aren’t that different from their non-Christian neighbours. We have the same viewing habits when it comes to television. We have the same vocabulary, especially when it comes to the adjectives in our

conversation we know we shouldn't use. We have worldly attitudes toward life-issues. We may read our horoscopes or gamble on lottery tickets. Rather than *[loving] one another earnestly from a pure heart* as Peter urges us to do, we may be cold and callous to the people around us, because we only worry about ourselves.

We may be in Rome, as it were, since we are far from our heavenly home, yet we are not to do as the Romans, as the people without faith do. Peter, led by the Spirit, is clear: *conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers.* By the grace of God we are different. Peter talks to us about the life we have in Christ. He says: *have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.* It is the very fact that we are born again that means we are not part of this dying world, but that we only exist here as strangers travelling through it. Peter knew and believed that God has done something to change our lives. Through the sacrifice of Christ, we are free from the sin that clings to us and messes up our lives. The dying and rising Saviour has destroyed the power the devil has over us. He has set us free from the empty way of life that so many people still cling to in this world. He did all this because of the great love that He has for us. And because God has done all of this for us, there is to be a change in us.

You and I, as the forgiven children of God, baptized into the name of Jesus and into a new life of grace will be different from the world. Our lives are not empty and vain. They have been redeemed at great cost: *not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.* Luther, in his explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed tells us that Christ gave Himself for us: *So that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.* (SC, 2nd Article). The life we have now have in Christ is a life lived for Christ. It is a life of faith and hope, for we know that there is more to our existence than the empty, meaningless things of this world. Everything is different, because Jesus died for us and rose again. We are different because Jesus died and rose again.

And so, Peter urges us to *conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers.* Rather than trying to fit in with the world, we need to be examples of God's grace and truth to the world. In the verses before our text, Peter says: *"Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy.""* (1 Peter 1:13-16, ESV)

We believe, and it affects how we do our job, always leading us to do our best, to be honest, hard-working employees. We believe, and it affects our relationship with others, taking away the prejudice or attitudes of judgment that may be in our hearts, and replacing them with understanding, acceptance and forgiveness for the weaker brother. We believe, and it means that we speak up when the clerk at the store gives us too much change, just as we would want them to do when they make a mistake and short-change us. We believe, and it means that we gather together in worship regularly and faithfully, because we don't see this as a waste of time or a nuisance, but as an opportunity to share, to care, and to strengthen ourselves for our lives as His people. We believe, and that means we take God at His word—and yes, that means all of His word, without trying to pick and choose only the teachings that we are willing to accept or which work to our advantage, but we willingly listen, learn and obey all of His word of truth and life.

A missionary was speaking to a group of people in a town in the interior of China, believing he was the first missionary there. He told them about Jesus: His life of love, kindness, healing, forgiving, helping. Someone interrupted and said, "Oh, yes, we know him. He used to live here." The missionary said, "Oh, no. He lived centuries ago in another land." But the native insisted that he had seen Jesus. "He lived in this village, and we know him." With that he led the missionary and the crowd that had gathered out to the village cemetery. There was the gravestone of a medical missionary who had lived in that village, served, healed, and died.

When people look at us, do they see us just like all the other people of the world? Or do they see Christ in us? Many Canadians wear a maple leaf pin or flag when travelling to identify themselves as Canadians. They want to be set apart from travellers from other nations. We are set apart, too. Maybe people can't see the water of our baptism that marks us as different from the world, but they can see the life we have because of all that Christ has done for us. He redeemed us from the empty, meaningless life of this world. He saved us from sin and death. He gave us the new birth that we have in our Baptism, so that we may live as strangers here, knowing with confidence and faith that our true home is in heaven. He gives us His Word and Spirit to guide us and teach us. That Word leads us to the hope and joy that are ours in Christ, and it assures us that when the

judge of all comes again, He will come to take His children home at last. Amen.