

Second Sunday of Easter; April 24, 2022  
2 Peter 1:16-21  
“The Word Is Truth to Strengthen and Protect”

**To be sure, we were not following cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the powerful appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father, when the voice came to him from within the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” We heard this voice, which came out of heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.**

**We also have the completely reliable prophetic word. You do well to pay attention to it, as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts, since we know this above all else: No prophecy of Scripture comes about from someone’s own interpretation. In fact, no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were being carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

Before St. Peter’s departure from this world, God the Holy Spirit used him to get a message across to God’s people. He told them to be ready. Be prepared, he said, for errors, lies, and false teachings that were soon going to make their way into the Christian Church. St. Peter wrote two letters with this central theme: be ready. Build up your faith in the truth and watch out for false teachers. And, as it works out, Christians can keep both of Peter’s encouragements in exactly the same way. The way to build up your own faith and be on your guard against what is false is to pay attention to the Word of God.

Almost 2000 years ago, dangerous false ideas were indeed creeping into the Christian Church. We shouldn’t wonder why the letters of the apostles, which make up the final furlong of the Bible, are loaded with warnings against false teachings. The Church was under constant assault from them. So the encouragements to grow in the truth and beware of what is false are all over in this part of Scripture. But the thing is this: false teachings never go away. They get repackaged, rebranded, and recycled. The same bad ideas that were creeping into the Christian Church two millennia ago are still alive and invasive.

2000 years later, those same errors still threaten in the Christian Church. On one level, this is strange. It is understandable that the outside world won’t believe in a six day creation. It is understandable enough that unbelievers reject the idea that Jesus Christ was truly God as well as real human man. You can understand why the world sees the Bible as just another book of fables, myths, and legends – on roughly the same level of quality and reliability as Aesop, Virgil, or Homer. We might not like it that the world sees things that way, but we should really expect these stances from confessed atheists, agnostics, and followers of other faiths.

But those same dangerous lies are not just on the outside of the Christian Church. The majority of Christians today are completely comfortable saying that macroevolution and Scripture are not in conflict; or that as long as we follow Jesus’ example, it doesn’t matter who he was exactly; or that it’s fine to believe the Bible has mistakes because, after all, it was written by sinful men and it’s not meant to be a science textbook anyway.

By now you're wondering: what does this have to do with Easter? Well, one of those false ideas that has crept to the inside of the Christian Church is this: maybe Jesus Christ didn't really rise from the dead on Easter. Maybe he just sort of went into shock on the cross, and the cold, damp grave woke him up, and he wandered out sometime before Sunday. (Yes, there are people who seriously say that.) Or, more likely, maybe Jesus never physically got out of the grave, but his disciples, what with all the stress and fatigue they were experiencing, maybe they just had visions of Jesus – hallucinations, like. Or, most likely, when the Bible says Jesus rose from the dead, it just means that he lived on the hearts of his people, inspiring them to head out to the world and spread the Christian message.

Even many who have risen to leadership positions inside the Christian Church have stood up to join this dangerous, false idea about Jesus' resurrection to all the other dangerous, false ideas I mentioned before. From the time of St. Peter, false ideas like this have spread from the outside of the Church to the inside. And when they do, they can start to affect us, even if our little corner of the Christian Church hasn't yet officially succumbed to them.

Unless we hide under a rock, we will hear them – including the one about Christ's resurrection. They can start to tug at our ears first, and then at our hearts. They start to play tricks with our brains, and cause faith's fire to flicker. We can start to wonder if everything that God said is the way it has to be, if we really do have to believe that someone dead actually blinked his eyes, sat up, removed his grave clothes neatly, and walked out of a tomb.

And that's the trick in how these lies work. It starts with things like creation and the reliability of Scripture. Then it moves on to lies about who Jesus was and whether he really rose. And once you get there – once you start questioning something like the resurrection of Christ – then Christianity itself is at stake. Because, as we heard on Easter Sunday from St. Paul, if Christ has not been raised, then he's a liar. He's not the Son of God. He hasn't conquered sin and death for us. And there's really no point at all in believing him. So the lies seem to start small, then they attack bigger things, and finally the biggest things of all. Finally they attack the things without which Christianity ceases to be of any value at all: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

But what power do we have to hold out against these false ideas? Remember, it's a dual command that Peter gives God's people: grow in what's true, and resist what is false at the same time. If we want to guard against destructive lies, then we have to be strong in what is true and right. But then we have to ask: how do we know that Peter tells us about Jesus' death and resurrection – or what any of Scripture tells us – is right? And how do we know that what that flies against it is false?

Peter could have cited one of the many miracles of the Messiah's ministry. He could have cited the resurrection from the dead or the ascension into heaven. But Peter chose to cite the transfiguration. It happened just before Lent began when Jesus and three of his disciples, including Peter himself, were on the mountain. Jesus turned bright white. He was visited by Moses and Elijah, and the Father spoke from heaven. That's what Peter is remembering when he writes: **For he received honor and glory from God the Father, when the voice came to him from within the Majestic Gry, saying, "This is my Son, whom I**

**love; with him I am well pleased.” We heard this voice, which came out of heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.**

What do you suppose Peter wants us to conclude from his eyewitness testimony of the transfiguration? Jesus’ transfiguration sheds light on why we trust God’s Word. God’s Word is fact, supported by multiple eyewitnesses – eyewitnesses who had nothing to gain and everything to lose from the story they were telling. They were eyewitnesses who had no reason in the world to tell the story they were telling unless it was true. They were not going to get rich off of it. They were not going to get fame from it. They were, in fact, going to suffer and die in poverty because of the story they were telling. And they told it anyway. That’s enough reason to believe it.

But Peter says more: **...we know this above all else: No prophecy of Scripture comes about from someone’s own interpretation. In fact, no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were being carried along by the Holy Spirit.** Earlier, Peter explained that the New Testament Scriptures are reliable because eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry recorded facts from Jesus’ life, not fiction of their own creation. Now Peter adds the Old Testament into the equation and points out another reason to depend on Scripture’s reliability. The Old Testament Scriptures did not originate with the Old Testament prophets; rather, the Old Testament prophets recorded the words and thoughts that God the Holy Spirit directed them to write. How can you tell? Everything the prophets of the Old Testament happened just as they said it would. No prognosticator or predictor or forecaster has a record like that. But the Old Testament prophets do. And the same is true for the New Testament. The apostles didn’t write down their own philosophies and ideas, but they recorded God’s words and thoughts.

The Bible records facts, and the Bible is the Word of God. So we have every reason in the world to listen to the Word carefully and to gather around the Word regularly as individuals and as a Christian congregation. Peter writes: **We also have a completely reliable prophetic word. You do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts...** Peter wanted his readers to understand: the light of God’s word scatters the darkness of sin and unbelief from our hearts. And that’s a message that Peter’s readers today need to hear as much as his original audience.

It is this study and learning of God’s Word that builds up our faith in the truth and protects against the lies that so easily creep into the Church and into our own hearts. Yes, it’s good to remember that the truth of God’s Word is supported by multiple eyewitness. And yes, it’s good to understand that Scripture comes from the mind of God, not the invention of men. But finally it’s the Spirit using the Word itself that creates confidence in what it says. It’s the Word itself that the Spirit uses to guard our hearts against every lie about the Word, our Savior and his resurrection. It’s the Spirit working through the Word itself that will leave us fully confident that our Savior, true God and true man, truly died and physically rose for us. In the face of every lie from outside and inside, the Word will keep us strong to believe it.

Peter’s dual command to guard against lies and be strong in the truth still stands for God’s people. Keep that command. And you will find your doubts and reservations about God’s Word shrinking, your vulnerability and susceptibility to the lies dying away. And in their place, you will find this: a growing faith

in the truth. And you'll find yourself with increased confidence that what God's Word says is true. Your Savior did come as God and man to win you back for God. He did live a holy life for you and lay it down. And, as we see in this Easter season, he picked it back up again to give you life for eternity.

You have the truth about that, based on what many eyewitnesses saw, based on the Word that came not from the mind of men but the mind of God. And most importantly, you have God's promise that the Spirit will use that Word itself to make you strong in its truth, and strong against anything that attacks it. Amen.