

## **“The Word will remain forever” 1 Peter 1:22-25**

**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.**

Can you believe it? It is the last day of 2017. These are the last hours and one more year is gone. Everything in this world comes and goes. As the Holy Spirit so wonderfully spoke through Isaiah the prophet. “All flesh is like grass and its glory like the flower of grass... the grass withers and the flower falls...”

It has been an interesting year, hasn't it? A lot of changes. A lot of new things. Things are different. A lot of good things. A lot of considering who we are, and why we are here. I would also add, a lot of joy. A lot of joy!

I have been asked quite often: “How are now things at St John's and St Paul's?” My answer has been: “Joyful. Really joyful.” At least that is how my family have perceived this year in our Christian family.

The Lord Jesus has been good to our congregation. He has blessed us with peace, in the middle of all these changes, and that's a wonderful gift. He has also blessed us with something else that was so much needed.

He has blessed us with kindness and gentleness, and patience in our relationships as we tried to find our way together. These are wonderful things. But even more importantly, they are ... yes, fruits of the Holy Spirit. Our dear Lord has been present among us and working through us.

We don't know what the new year will bring us. There are many hopes. There are many prayers ascending to our Lord. There are many things we all as individuals and as the congregation try to do. Let's just ask our Lord that He continues to bless us as He finds it fitting.

This evening we have for our meditations the words that Peter the apostle sent to all Christians living in this world, scattered among the nations, longing for the return of the Lord Jesus.

The writings of the New Testament are so rich, sometimes to extent that it is difficult to understand, so many things, so many images are put together in one sentence. It is true for our today's reading as well.

Therefore, I took the liberty to make my own translation, hoping that it could be helpful. Let's hear what the Spirit says through Peter once more: “You are born again. Not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, of the living and abiding Word of God. By your obedience to the truth [that is, Jesus Christ] you have purified your souls for a sincere brotherly love. Now love one another earnestly

from a pure heart. “Because 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 is the Word that was brought to you as the Good News.”

Okay, let’s look at it! “You are born again.” This is so important. You are born again. Think on these words! You are a new creation. You are a child of God, a brother, or sister of Jesus, you are an heir of God’s eternal Kingdom. You are!

This is not one more identity among others. Like a member of service club, or sport’s team, or any other society or group. This is one identity that will remain forever. This is one identity that needs to shape everything you do.

Because, you are not born of perishable seed, but of imperishable, of the living and abiding Word of God. God spoke His angry word of judgment over your sins, and this word of judgment brought death to your old self.

Then He spoke the word of grace and love and this word gave you a new life, true life, eternal life. For your new identity is not born of something that will grow old and will pass away, it is born of the eternal Word of God.

And once you were born again, you were born for a new life. That’s right. God doesn’t give us this precious gift of a new life so that we could continue in our old sins and selfishness.

He gives us this new life so that we could live it in obedience to Jesus Christ. In obedience! And we are talking here about the Commandments of our Lord. This is important, so listen carefully.

We are born anew. Whose work is it? Of course, it is God’s work. But now, when we think about our new lives in obedience to Jesus, whose work is it? Again, it is God’s work in us.

It is the Holy Spirit working in us, changing us, enabling us to live God pleasing lives. But, wait, someone could ask, but we do we do? Aren’t we responsible for being good Christians and living God pleasing lives?

It is actually very simple. It is the same with our new life, as it is with our old bodily life. We didn’t create ourselves. We were created. Even now, we don’t possess our life, it is continually given to us. It is God’s gift.

But our responsibility is to care for what is given to us and to use it properly. We are to feed our bodies, to exercise, to protect them from everything that would harm them. We can’t create ourselves, we don’t possess our life, but by not caring for it, we can lose it. That’s what is in our power.

The same is true with our new life. We are born again. God’s work. We live our new lives of obedience. It is God’s work. But we need to care for this new life and we need to use it properly. If we don’t, we can lose it.

This is, why it is called the life of obedience. The Holy Spirit enables to you to love your God, and to obey Him, and to love your neighbors and to serve them, but every time we choose not to do God's will, not to live according His Commandments, in fact, we reject God's grace, we reject the Holy Spirit. Every time you chose to disobey, you drive God's Spirit away from you.

Do you see how it works? If you think 'fine, my life is God's gift' I don't need to do anything', you will soon die of thirst and hunger. The same is true with your new life. If you think that you don't need to strive to lead a holy life (as we say in our liturgy), then you put your new life in grave dangers.

With every act of disobedience we drive the Spirit away. Every time our God invites us to feed us in the Divine Service of Bible study and we chose to ignore Him, we reject His Spirit.

With every act of Christian obedience to Jesus we are transformed more and more in Jesus' image. This is, why this new life of obedience is so important. For by this life of obedience we purify our souls.

Every time we choose to obey your Lord, we triumph over sin and purify our soul. Every time we choose to disobey, the sin regains its power over us. That simple. And we are in this battle every day of our lives.

Then Peter shows the next connection. We live in obedience to prepare our souls for brotherly love. The more we master our own disobedient hearts, the more we are capable to love sincerely our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Remember, when Jesus summarized the Commandments, He ended up with only two. Love your God! And love your neighbor! That's it. We are born again, and it is God's gift. We are born for the life of obedience to the Commandments.

And as we, enabled by God's Spirit, grow in this new life of obedience, it purifies our souls and helps us to love one another from a pure heart. What a wonderful picture!

The Father Himself gives us this new life. His life-giving Spirit enables us to live it in obedience to Jesus. And as we strive to obey our Lord, He purifies our hearts so that we are capable to love more and more.

This is what our Christian lives are about. About our God, about things imperishable. "Because 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."

We spoke about it on Christmas Eve, we have spoken about it many time, and we all know it well. Everything in this world, including ourselves and our loved ones, withers and perishes. Everything.

But... the Word of the Lord remains forever. And this is the Word that was brought to you as the Good News. Peter puts it so clearly. The Word of the Lord remains forever, and you have received the same Word.

The same Word was brought to you as the Good News. God has spoken it to you. He has spoken it into you. The Word of God is God. And if you are born of the Word of God, you are born of God. Hear these words with your heart! If you are united with Him, with the eternal God ... you too will remain forever.

Just look around! What do you see? I will tell you. You are surrounded with eternal beings. That's right, this world will pass away, but these people, these brothers and sisters that now sit next to you, they will remain forever. Forever!

This year is almost over, as is this sermon. Concluding I just want to pray that we all would care for our new lives of faith with at least the same diligence as we care for our bodily lives.

That we would all be fed with rich and healthy food, that we would all drink pure and life-giving waters of God's Word, that we would carefully avoid anything that may endanger our faith, and would grow in our lives of obedience so that we all can bear much fruit for glory of our Lord Jesus.

Blessed this coming year to you and your loved ones! Amen.