

## **“R&R for 2021” 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.**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

One more year is gone. And what a year it has been. We kicked it off in style, as it seemed listening to our media that this country is going to burn to the ground. As soon as the flames had gone out, the virus descended upon us.

Not just upon us, the entire world stopped. We have gradually begun to move around again, more and more of our usual activities are making their way back to our daily lives. We are even blessed to be able to gather in God’s presence, to listen to His voice, and to receive His gifts.

But the series of events that the virus has triggered, is by no means over, and no one can predict what is yet to come. That is how we end this year, and for our last meditation this year we have a very fitting reading from 1 Peter.

Peter is sometimes called the apostle of hope. He was writing to Christians in Roman empire at the time when they experienced real persecution. Not just some inconveniences, but real, tangible threats to their well-being and even their lives.

To them Peter addressed this letter, and there is so much wisdom and encouragement that would apply to us as well. Today I just wanted to briefly focus on two such things. R&R. I guess you know what that means?

Aha! But not today. R&R here stands for “running” and “rejoicing”. I want to talk with you about us running and rejoicing in the coming year. First about running. What do I mean by this running? Let’s see.

This year was different. But we shouldn’t be painting it in too dark colours. Sure, it was rather tragic for some, but for most it was more like a matter of inconvenience. Our freedoms to do whatever we want, whenever we want and wherever we want were restricted, sure. On top of that was this uncertainty. Perhaps even fear.

So many voices from different ends of religious and political spectrum contributed to that. “Our climate is in crises. Our planet is dying. Everything is going to get really bad. Deadly virus is spreading. It is mutating and perhaps getting more deadly. How can we stop it? Global economy is going to collapse, the darkest times are still ahead. The structure of the society is going to change.

The corporation will own all money and they will dictate our fate. Total surveillance and control are coming our way, and this global health crisis has only brought it closer. Soon we may not be able to buy and sell unless... who knows.”

We hear it from day to day. And there is so much contradictory information. It is hard to know what to believe. What is going on?! It may feel like darkness is surrounding us and growing thicker and thicker and there are various evil forces hiding in that darkness. Bad things are happening... bad things are coming...

What can we do? What should we do as Christians? The answer I would like to suggest is – run. Let me explain. Do you know who is behind this all? Climate change (if that is indeed happening), viruses, crumbling economies, moves towards total control, and every other frightening thing in our world? Do you know who?

But of course, you know – it is our God the Father and our Brother Jesus Christ. There is no one else in charge. There is no other god or power that can rule somehow independently. It is our God, the Triune God who is behind everything.

As I was writing this sermon up in Kaiserstuhl park, a brother in Christ stopped by and said: “You should quote Psalm 103:19!” “The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all.” (Ps 103:19) Or Samuel: “The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.” (1 Sam 2:6).

This is incredibly important for us to understand. No one can do anything without our God knowing it. “Even the hairs of your head are all numbered.” (Mt 10:30) Yes, bad things happen. Evil things happen. Really evil. We can’t possibly know or understand the reason why they happen; they may be frightening and terrifying, but we can be fully assured – our God is in control.

Now about running. This is one of the most brilliant teaching of Dr Luther. He taught that when we are scared of what is happening in this world – he called it works of hidden God – then we need to run. But, of course, we can’t outrun God.

Where to run? We need to run from the Hidden God towards God Revealed. For we know that there is only one true God. And He has revealed what His attitude towards us is. You can’t learn about His heart towards you in wild-fires, or in pandemics, or in threatening totalitarian structures, but you can learn about His heart towards you where He has revealed it. Where is it?

In Jesus. On the cross. As Peter wrote: “[Always remember that] you were ransomed... 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.” (1 Pet 1:18-19)

This is where our God shows how much He cares for us. There is no one else in charge. No other gods. There is no way to run or hide from this God. But we can and we should run from hidden and frightening God to God Revealed, to Jesus and to our Father who is in heaven.

Because He has given you a new life, as Peter wrote, you have been born not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; and this word of the Lord, the Good News for you, remains forever. Unchanging.

And because His attitude towards us – His love and commitment and desire to be with you – is unchanging, He will make it happen, regardless of what we may see happening in this world. If you fear, if you are concerned, run! Run to God Revealed, run to Jesus and He will bless you with His peace and His joy.

This much about running, now briefly about the other “R”, about rejoicing. What is that about? I think we all would benefit from a slight correction in how we perceive this world and how we respond to what we experience.

The prevailing way this world thinks is that we rejoice and are glad and happy when everything goes the way we want. When everything is good according to our expectations, when “my will happens”. Then we can rejoice.

Surely, it is not entirely wrong, we may rejoice when things come together well, and our lives are filled with blessings of our generous Father. But the world can’t rejoice and be happy when that is not happening.

The world teaches that we are entitled to satisfy whatever desires we have. We are entitled to be happy and must get what we want. And with such mindset it is very hard to rejoice if things don’t go your way, even more, if you experience adversity.

This is where the beauty of Christian joy comes in. And this, I believe, is something we all need to learn to do better – to rejoice when we suffer adversity because of the name of Jesus. That’s right. Sure, we rejoice when the name of Jesus is welcomed, but we are also to rejoice when we are rejected...

In the sermon on the Mount Jesus said: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.” (Mt 5:10-12)

Sending His disciples to proclaim the Gospel Jesus warned: “I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves [...] rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

(Lk10:3, 20) Foretelling about the last times He said: “And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Mk 13:13)

That is how the apostles lived. When they were rebuked, imprisoned and threatened by the government “... they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.” (Acts 5:41)

That is what they taught. Paul: “We rejoice in our sufferings...”. (Rom 5:3, 5) Or Peter: “Rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith ... may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet 1:6-7)

I guess most of us would prefer peaceful life without adversity, at least I would prefer it any day... but the truth is – when Christians face adversity, when we need to stand for what we believe, ready to pay the price, those are the times when we begin to experience the true power of the Holy Spirit in us.

When all is good, and we are in control, we don’t even think that we would need God’s help. But when the situation is out of our hands, when our own strength is far from being enough, the Holy Spirit allows us to experience what mighty power, what incredible divine strength dwells in us.

Those are the situation when we rejoice with divine joy, not because our will has happened, not because the world is friendly towards us, but because even in the midst of trials and tribulations we experience our Lord’s presence, His joy.

Remember, Jesus gave up everything and suffered everything so that only He can have us, so that only we may be His own. I wish we all could rejoice in Jesus as He does in us, when we can admit, not just in words, but from the depth of our hearts – “if only I have you, Jesus, it is enough for me. You are enough for me”.

I am not looking forward to some scary and challenging times, but if they come, I pray that we all know what to do – run towards God Revealed, Jesus Christ, and rejoice that we have been found worthy to suffer for His name’s sake.

Put it this way – let us be ready for some R&R, let us be ready to run and rejoice! Come 2021, and by God’s grace, we will be ready.

Amen.