

Eyewitnesses
2 Peter 1:12-18

As I prepared for this sermon this week, I thought, “Maybe we should change the name of the church.” The words Covenant, Reformed, and Presbyterian are all great words. But according to the emphasis of our text this morning, maybe we need to identify our apostolic foundation rather than our reformed and presbyterian background. So our name could be Covenant Apostolic Church. Or maybe more boldly, “The Apostolic Church of Mt. Airy.” It has a ring to it, doesn’t it?

Of course, once you go down that road, a lot of good words come into play. The apostles laid the foundation for the church, but the church they established was really founded on the day of Pentecost with the blessing of outpouring of the Holy Spirit. So we could make our name a little to reflect that commitment as well, perhaps “The Pentecostal Apostolic Church” of Mt. Airy.”

If we made that change and advertised it throughout our community, I suspect that we would get some visitors that might never come to a church named Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church. But I also think that, in our culture, we might be communicating something that we don’t really want to communicate. So don’t worry, when the Session meets this Friday, I’m not going to be making any of these suggestions. But I want you to think in those terms because these words really do define who we are. We really are an apostolic church. The foundation of our church isn’t in the 16th century Protestant reformation, as world-changing an event as that was. We go back much farther than that. The foundation of our church isn’t in the development of the presbyterian form of government that can be traced to John Knox in Scotland toward the end of the 16th century. No, our foundation, the bedrock upon which this church

is built, is that foundation laid by the apostles. And the cornerstone of that foundation is none other than Jesus himself.

No fuller definition of the church is found in Scripture than this description of the household of God,

Eph. 2:19 “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

I want all of those thoughts to be in your mind this morning, because that is the context in which Peter writes. We’re going to shift a little bit this morning, as you have seen Peter shift the whole time I have been preaching here. He shifts quickly and easily between the declaration of the gospel and the applications of that gospel to our lives as Christians. For Peter, it’s back and forth, back forth. The gospel, then the law. The promise, then the exhortation. The declaration of truth then the application of that truth to your lives. And the last couple weeks we’ve been look at that application. In plain, obvious terms. He writes in verse 5, “giving all diligence.” Again, verse 10, “be even more diligent.” Back in verse 5, “add to your faith...”

So this morning we return to a determined focus upon the gospel itself. Specifically, the truth of that gospel that has been revealed by God—the enduring, unchanging truth that finds its definition in the person of Jesus. In the glory of Jesus!

I hope you read what the reformers wrote as God used them to transform his church. I hope you read Calvin, and Luther. And Knox. I hope you read what the Puritans and contributors to the

Westminster Assembly wrote. They wrote great things. I hope you read and study what people are still writing today for the benefit of the church. There are even some good things to read on the internet.

But there is something else you need to read and study even more. And, ultimately, there is only one book that you need to study. Only one book is the foundation of what you should believe and how you should live. And there is only one book that I will declare to you as I preach week by week. It's what Peter calls in verse 12 "the present truth." The truth that is present with you, here today, just as certainly as it was when Peter wrote this short book we are studying. The present truth.

In verse 19, he calls it "the prophetic word confirmed." And then, more explicitly, in verse 20, "prophecy of Scripture." They mean the same thing. The prophetic word confirmed is the prophecy of Scripture. The word of Scripture is the prophetic word, the word of the apostles and prophets sent by God for that very purpose, to speak God's word to God's people. And to have that word put into writing. Hence, the title, "the Scriptures." And as we'll focus our attention next week,

v.20 "...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

Peter makes his purpose even clearer in,

3:1 "Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), 2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior."

So that's Peter's purpose, that you may be mindful of what the prophets spoke, that you may be mindful and aware of what the apostles' of Jesus spoke, confirming Jesus' own words to them.

And that is my purpose as well, as I would say to you exactly what Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

1 Cor. 2:1 "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

So, if your faith is to be in the power of God, then my job is to proclaim to you the word of God. So here is where we will begin this morning.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF APOSTOLIC TEACHING.

Peter certainly stresses that importance.

v.12

Peter had a very appropriate sense of his own importance, as did Paul and the other apostolic writers. They were laying a permanent and lasting foundation, and they knew it. That body of apostolic teaching would be collected and recorded in the Scriptures, and as such it would be the very foundation upon which the church is built. It is the foundation upon which this church is built. It is the foundation upon which our denomination rests. So Peter doesn't hesitate to offer reminders, to repeat the things that he has taught. He doesn't apologize for repeating himself. He realizes that,

A. Apostolic reminders are necessary for our spiritual stability.

Simply put, we need reminders. Frequent reminders. Of that which is true and necessary.

Peter is very diplomatic and pastoral. He is very encouraging and supportive, but he is direct. And repetitive! “I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things.”

It isn't new or novel ideas that Peter wants to stress, but the same old ones. The apostolic foundation of what is true.

His tactfulness is evident by the encouraging words he writes, “though you know and are established in the present truth.” Peter doesn't insult his listeners. He doesn't belittle them or patronize them. He gives them credit for the stability of faith which they possess, for their knowledge of the truth. He praises them for being firmly established, for not wavering, and he encourages them by recognizing that stability.

These are seasoned Christians to whom he writes, not new believers tossed about by every wind of doctrine. They are fully indoctrinated in the truths of the gospel. And he commends their faith so that they will remain more firmly fixed in it.

But he still reminds them. He reminds them so that they will remain faithful. He takes every opportunity to refresh their memories, a word which actually means to wake up or arouse. Peter realizes the human tendency to rest upon the laurels of past achievements and fail to be alert. We are lulled asleep, as if we are living in peace while spiritual warfare against Satan and his cohorts is raging all around us.

And without apology, he says that he will keep reminding them

as long as the Lord lets him live.

v.13

Calvin comments so appropriately that it is necessary to “encourage the faithful who are otherwise overcome by the laziness of the flesh.” He says that, “although they had no lack of teaching, yet the stimulus of these exhortations is useful so that carelessness and self-indulgence do not overthrow and finally obliterate what they have properly learned, as is so often the case.”

Carelessness and self-indulgence. Laziness of the flesh. Those are the typical besetting sins of those fully indoctrinated in the faith. Aren't they?

Those would be the typical dangers in a church such as ours, where we emphasize and proclaim the fullness of the apostolic teaching. We have the doctrinal stability. We are firmly established in the truth. And we need this apostolic reminder. Our memories need to be refreshed and stirred by the basic truths of the gospel, truths which are allowed to transform our entire lives and move us to seek an ever-increasing measure of godliness in the way that we live.

Apostolic teaching is absolutely essential. And we must never begrudge the repetition of these reminders. We must never think that apostolic teaching is boring or of little practical value. Our spiritual stability depends upon it.

Note the urgency of Peter.

v.13-14

Peter realizes that he is about to die. In the appropriate symbolism of his words, he is about to put aside the tent in which

he is living, the tent which is his physical body. That tent, in contrast to a permanent home, is by definition temporary.

B. Apostolic reminders are necessary because of the apostles' own mortality.

Paul uses the same illustration of the body in,

2Cor. 5:1 “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, 3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.”

Peter is mortal, as are all men. I have been reminded of my own mortality this week. One of the rewards of turning 50 is that all the doctors tell you its time to get a screening for colon cancer. And I don't disagree with their wisdom, though it took me a few extra years to get there. Thursday was my day, and while I knew the preparation would be horrible, I was led to believe that the recovery to be relatively easy. But I came out of the anesthesia with an almost violent cough and a very severe sore throat. When all the anesthesia wore off, I realized just how badly my ribs hurt, from all the coughing. And I was reminded of that pain as I continued to have to cough, only now without the benefit of any pain killers.

So I'm mortal. I had a really crummy week, and I'm still feeling it this morning. And that sense of mortality pales in comparison to so many others, those who face the imminent reality and pain of death. We are all mortal. But in addition to the mortality he shares with all men, Peter knows by divine revelation that the days of his life are short. And in fact, the entire age of the

apostles would end. The age of apostolic teaching would come to a close. They would all die, and their office would come to a close, for it was a requirement by definition that an apostle be one who had been an eyewitness to Jesus Christ. By definition, an apostle was one who had seen Jesus in the flesh.

Thus the urgency. So as long as they were alive, they would lay the foundation of the church by repeated reminders of the body of truth they taught. And since they would die, it is obvious that,

C. Apostolic reminders are necessary to create a permanent record.

It wasn't enough for the apostles to see that the people then were firmly established in the truth. They saw to it that future generations would be firmly established, generations that would live long after the apostles all died. Generations such as ours.

For that to happen, there had to be a permanent record. Peter was committed to building that record.

v.15

He writes of Paul, too, contributing to that permanent record. Regarding the Lord's patience bringing salvation, Peter says that,

2 Peter 3:15 “...as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.”

Notice the word Scriptures! That word means, literally, a written record. A permanent written record. That which is written

down, and is therefore forever authoritative. The written documents are God's infallible word, written, as we'll see next week, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:20 "...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

The permanent record which the apostles created was the scriptures. The Bible. And the usefulness of the Bible is obvious. Long after all the apostles have departed, we still have their written record. We still have the Scriptures. And the Scriptures are still "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

So the importance of apostolic teaching continues. The apostles did not look to their own age alone, but intended us also to have the benefit. Therefore, although they are all now dead, their teaching still lives on and flourishes.

And so we rightly emphasize the importance of that teaching today, apostolic teaching. Biblical teaching. And that teaching stands in contrast to all the man-made teachings of our day, for Peter says of himself along with the other apostles,
v.16-18

There we have,

II. THE TRUTHFULNESS OF APOSTOLIC TEACHING.

That teaching is contrasted with what the NASB translates "cleverly devised tales." Cunningly devised fables. Cleverly devised myths. All the English translates capture the right

meaning of the words. Things that are made up, fake news, as we hear so much about today. Fake stories. Myths, fables. And they weren't made up by accident. Cunningly devised fables.

The word for "cleverly devised" is a form of the word for wisdom, though with a very negative connotation. The idea is not so much acting with great wisdom, but that of concocting something subtly. It has the idea of scheming, and is well translated "cleverly invented."

And the stories which were cleverly invented amount to myths, which is the actual Greek word used. What is a myth? A myth is a story which man has formulated to express his own desires without any reference to reality. A made-up story invented in the imagination of a man. No connection with reality. And no power, no redemptive power. That is, the message of a myth cannot save a man from his sins, nor can it provide the power to change or transform his life.

The apostolic writings of Scripture are entirely different!

Hebr. 4:12 "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

A. Apostolic teaching is entirely different than man-made myths.

"We did not follow cleverly devised tales."

The warning against foolish myths should be familiar. We hear it a lot.

1Tim. 1:3 "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia-- remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, 4 nor give heed to fables and endless

genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.”

1Tim. 4:6 “If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. 7 But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.”

2Tim.4:3 “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

There are plenty of man-made myths abounding in the church of our day. Myths that are nothing more than man-made ideas foisted upon naive and gullible believers. And those myths will inevitably arise when we fail to radically believe the words Peter wrote earlier in this chapter.

2Pet. 1:3 “...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.”

Myths are everywhere. And we constantly need to separate apostolic teaching from man-made myths. They are entirely different things. That which originates with God and that which originates with men are two entirely different things!

There is one key test of apostolic teaching. One clear distinction of it from all man-made myths.

B. Apostolic teaching is focused entirely upon Jesus Christ.

Specifically, his majesty. The glory of his majesty. What was it that Peter would remind the people of?

v.16 “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”

The subject of apostolic teaching is Jesus Christ. It is an eyewitness account of Jesus. From beginning to end. His power. And his coming.

There are many preachers who spent a great deal of time telling stories. Some of them very good stories and some very entertaining. But stories themselves have no power! Entertainment has no power to transform your life. Even captivating or eloquent speeches have no power, not if the subject is anything other than the power of God shown in the person of Jesus Christ. And the only purpose of any human stories in preaching is to illustrate that power. The power of God.

And that power of Jesus Christ is connected with his coming, a technical Greek word related to the second coming of Jesus in all power and authority. It is the Greek word “parousia.” That parousia, that second coming, will indeed be the greatest of all demonstrations of Christ’s power, for his second coming will be a day of eternal judgment. And it will be a day of eternal salvation. It is a day which Peter will more fully describe in,

2Pet. 3:7 “But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men...10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be

burned up.”

That’s power!

1Ths. 4:15 “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

That’s power.

2 Thes.2:8 “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.”

That’s power. And the apostolic teaching which will edify your souls and strengthen your faith is focused entirely upon that power! And so must our preaching. If preaching is not centered in Christ and in his redemptive power, it is useless.

Moralistic or legalistic preaching is useless, of no power. The basic message is simply “do good.” Psychological preaching is useless, of no power. The basic message is self-centered and and focused on human emotions and self-help. Philosophical preaching is useless, of no power. The basic message is some sort of advanced knowledge, philosophically and intellectually advanced. Like a university lecture.

For the message to have power, the focus must be on Christ! For it is the gospel of Jesus Christ that is the power of God. So Paul would write,

Rom. 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

Or as Paul says to Timothy,

2Tim. 3:1 “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”

There is a lot of religion today, but sadly, much of it has only a form of godliness, denying its power. Denying the power to change a man’s heart, to transform a man’s life. The power to alter the course of a nation. And so, if our teaching could be called apostolic, it must be focused upon Jesus Christ, his power and his coming. And notice the climax of this passage, that which sets the apostles apart from us.

v.16b “...[we] were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”

Peter and the other apostles didn’t follow cleverly invented stories. Instead, they were eyewitnesses of the majesty of Jesus Christ.

C. Apostolic teaching is verified by eyewitness account.

Notice the specific event which Peter refers to as an eyewitness.

v.17-18

That's the so-called transfiguration, found in,

Matt. 17:1 "Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; 2 and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" 6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. 7 But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." 8 When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only."

Peter, along with James and John, were eyewitnesses of his majesty. This event was not a figment of their imaginations. It was not a dream. It was not something that they created in their own minds. They saw the majesty of Christ, appearing with Moses and Elijah. And Peter uses that event as a prefiguring of the glory of Jesus' second coming.

Indeed, the majesty which the apostles witnesses was announced by God himself, in a most unmistakable way.

v.17

They witnessed this occasion when Jesus received honor and glory from his father in heaven, which Peter calls "the Majestic Glory." "The excellent glory."

God the Father is revealing the power and the glory of his only Son. And I can't fully explain that to you. In fact, I would be foolish to try. Instead I simply want to proclaim to you the power

and glory of Jesus Christ, the majestic glory of God himself.

I have not been an eyewitness to such a revelation, but the apostles' were, and that's what gives them the authority that I do not have. For they are able to say,

v.18

But I can say to you, "Listen to them." Listen to the apostles, and to their teaching. For the truthfulness of their teaching is verified by their being eyewitness of the majesty of Christ. Don't listen to me, listen to them. Don't listen to the books you read, listen to them.

I believe that we spend far too much time thinking far too small thoughts. We spend far too much time thinking about the eternally insignificant events of our daily lives. We spend far too much time thinking about our own problems, and about our own successes and accomplishments. We spend far too much time thinking about the ordinary, routine affairs of life. We spend far too much time hopelessly absorbed with ourselves!

And I call you to something greater this morning. I call you to consider the power and the majesty of Jesus Christ. I call you to consider the awesome display of glory shown in Jesus Christ at that transfiguration. And that is the greatest thought that you could ever have. Far from boring and impractical theology, this is the greatest and most glorious activity that we could ever possibly be engaged in. Thinking about God. Considering the glory of Jesus Christ.

Think about what the apostles' actually saw. Think about what God the Father actually spoke. Think about Jesus, the one who received such honor and glory at that time.

“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Today, in the midst of your life, whatever is going on in your life, think deeply about Jesus, the son whom the father loved, the son with whom the father was well pleased. Think deeply about the father who bestowed such honor and glory upon Jesus his son.

Hebr. 12:2 “[look] unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”