

Ready to Travel!  
Sermon Text for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent (Okuli)  
Sermon Text: 1 Peter 1:13-21



*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. <sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, <sup>15</sup> but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup> since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." <sup>17</sup> 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, <sup>18</sup> knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. <sup>20</sup> He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you <sup>21</sup> 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.*

Whoever takes a long trip mustn't hinder himself with unnecessary luggage or other impediments. His luggage must contain everything he needs because carrying around the wrong things can ruin his trip. To suddenly stand naked in front of people or to wear the wrong clothes can be extremely embarrassing or completely ruin the trip. This happened to me once at airport security. As you might know, before you go through to be screened, you must of course remove everything from your pockets and put it all in large plastic trays, including your belt. However one time, when I was re-fastening my belt, the buckle suddenly flew off with a great clang, making the belt useless, and my pants hanging about 4 inches lower than usual. So I had to constantly hold up my pants with one hand while I rushed from one place to the next. And when I had to bend over, I always had the extremely uncomfortable feeling that my pants would fall down completely. As a result, I can relate very well to what Peter means when he writes: "gird up the loins of your mind!" (1 Peter 1:13, KJV) Because whoever goes on a trip must not only have packed the appropriate things, but also be simply and practically dressed so that he isn't constantly stumbling over his own clothes. In our sermon text today, it's also about a journey, namely the journey of Christians in this world. Peter's letter wants to admonish us not to trip over our own clothes. However, Peter doesn't give us any advice about what clothing we should wear. In fact, he says that there are things in the mind that can be similar to a missing belt that can cause us to stumble, especially by distracting us from the hope that is in Christ. Whoever "girds his loins" is already preparing to travel. He has the destination in mind and heads purposefully for this goal. Yet it happens often enough to Christians that we have the destination in mind, but our thoughts are like the previously mentioned broken belt which causes us to stumble and stagger forward with one hand holding tight to the things of this world or sometimes not making any progress at all, possibly even turning off in the wrong direction. Peter is talking here about human desires. Christians are not ghosts hovering a few inches above normal people. We stand with both feet on this earth and feel the same way as everyone else. We all know how one negative thought or one mean word from another person is like a cancer that can spread through your whole life. There is even the danger that these thoughts can permeate your whole life and take it over.

These thoughts can determine and dictate our lives – what we should or should not do. Living according to the dictates of our desires can be terrible torment. What frees us is knowing to Whom we belong. Peter introduces our Christian life with this bold statement: We should be holy... why? Because God is holy! As children of God, the nature of God should also determine our life. Isn't that a little over the top? Who can even radiate God's essence? Don't we open the door to hypocrisy instead of radiating the holiness of God? It's important to remember that Peter assumes that we haven't gotten to our goal yet. We are on a journey and haven't yet reached our destination. Peter himself had to go through painful experiences that he lost his way and had to be brought back to the right path by the Lord Jesus. To be holy in this world means that we know

our destination. It's just like driving a car. If you drive a car, you must look ahead and never lose sight of your destination. If you allow yourself to be distracted by looking to the right or to the left, you lose sight of your destination and that can lead to disaster. In our Christian journey, it is important that we are focused on this goal in Christ. If we have that goal in mind, many other things that previously defined us, worried us, or even dragged us into depression and hopelessness can be put into perspective. Peter admonishes us to cast off unnecessary burdens. Through faith, we are free from the things of this world. We don't burden ourselves with things that weigh us down. We know for ourselves that the most necessary things in life belong to this temporal world. At any moment we are ready to take off everything that belongs to this life like a piece of clothing and move on. "Gird up the loins of your mind," Peter warns us in his first letter. Stay ready to travel! Stay flexible! Stay on the road! Don't let yourselves be conformed! Even if we have to work and deal with matters of life, we don't let ourselves be defined or distracted by them. We don't let ourselves be dominated by the things of the world as if there were nothing else. Be prepared at all times to give up work, career, family, and everything that belongs to life. That is what Christians are urged to do. And Peter cautions us modern Christians just like he did the churches of that time: Have we become too comfortable? Have we simply settled down in this world with its laws? Are we even using the good gifts of God as if they were an end in themselves? As if they were only there for our enjoyment? As if all of life is there just for our pleasure? As if we must stay here forever? As if everything would stay the way it is right now forever? Peter's letter wants to encourage and remind us that we are just passing through. All this because we have a different identity as Christians.

*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.* When Peter says here that we are ransomed, he used terms that come from the slave trade which were well known at that time. We no longer have a slave trade today and human trafficking is rightly viewed as abhorrent. Back then, slave trading was commonplace. At that time, it happened that someone, out of mercy, bought a slave for the sole purpose of freeing him. This is the image used in Peter's letter. We were slaves – slaves to sin, slaves to death, slaves to desires. We have the great good fortune to have found a Lord who bought us with the sole purpose that we should be free. But the image of our Lord Jesus, who buys us, is at one point quite different from that of a good-natured master who sets aside a little money from his abundance so that some unfortunate people will have better lives. No, the Lord Jesus gives Himself – *not with gold or silver, but with His own precious blood.* When we say it like that, then Jesus is none other than the Holy God Himself. God Himself gives Himself so that we can live. Could anything be more precious than this gift?

And when this God sets us free, it's not so that we no longer have a master. No, we now belong entirely to our Lord. That means that our path here on earth has a very different quality. We belong to the loving God. We will come into His eternity and that is the goal of our entire life. That's why nothing and no one here on earth can throw us off course – illness, grief, death, these things may touch us, but we can never lose heart because we belong to the Lord Jesus. And if we are despised, mocked, or persecuted by others, we can always find comfort in our Lord Jesus and in the Holy Spirit. The words of Peter's letter are saturated with great grace and freedom. They proclaim the good news that comes from the cross and the blood of Jesus.

We are all on a journey in our lives. However, we don't know what tomorrow will bring or where our journey will take us. But we carry an important letter in our luggage that encourages and cautions us not to give up on the great journey. In our luggage is our baptism, a guarantee that we belong to God. It's a journey into great freedom – a journey that is not without rest stops and not without refreshment. The celebration of the Lord's Supper provides refreshment along the way. This is where God shares Himself in His body and blood. Here we are given great freedom. *Gird up the loins of your mind.* The goal of our journey is before our eyes. Our Lord Jesus stands there with open arms and calls out: "Come to freedom! I have redeemed you!" Amen.