

The conference theme asks what it means to be 'God's Church for God's World'. Read Archbishop Justin's reflections on 1 Peter at the first Bible exposition at the Lambeth Conference, on the theme of 'Called into hope & holiness in Christ.' The journey through 1 Peter will explore a range of themes including belonging, alienation, exile, slavery and persecution, hospitality, mission and reconciliation.



Come Holy Spirit and open our eyes that we may see wonders in your Word. Amen.

Good morning. It's wonderful to see you. So why 1 Peter? When we started looking at this, almost everyone before the St. Augustine's seminars said, '1 Peter? Why 1 Peter? What's wrong with Paul? Is he out of fashion?' And once they studied 1 Peter, they said, 'yes, 1 Peter, obviously'. We know that the Bible is central, is foundational to everything we do as Christians. We know that the Bible is especially at the heart of Anglicanism, studying scripture together, hearing scripture in our liturgies, wrestling with the text together. Listening to the spirit, in the Anglican tradition, is not open only to those who are trained and equipped. It is the gift of God's word to every Christian.

One of the greatest impulses for the development of national education in England at the beginning of the 19th century, was so that everyone could read the Bible. And scripture is the foundation of this conference and each morning we will be studying 1 Peter and listening to the witness of a wide range of voices engaging with this text. 1 Peter engages a number of big themes for us as a church holiness, exile and displacement, power and authority, hope and suffering, hospitality, and others.

And it's striking that although the world in which we live is completely different to that of Peter in the first century, and although the world has shifted on its axis in the last 10 years with COVID, and other things, the message of 1st Peter is still absolutely relevant. Its context is relevant. From its very opening. We are told that the letter is from the Apostle Peter, to the exiles of the dispersion, the diaspora, In Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.

Exile has two meanings in Peter. In 1st, Peter, the first meaning is, as we would understand, exile round the world, as everyone understands exile. It is people who are living other than in their native country, their home country, driven out perhaps by war, perhaps by circumstances, whatever it is, by trade, they've decided to go overseas, they are living away from home. And in the Roman world, the Roman Empire, that was a dangerous place to be, because you did not have the protection of law in the same way, as the indigenous people to each area did. It's true in many places today. Secondly, exile is a theological term, meaning that all Christians everywhere, all of us have our first citizenship in heaven and we have dual nationality. Our second citizenship is our passport on this earth.

And it's really important as well, because Christians, if we describe Christians, the earthly nationality is the qualifier, you're an English Christian, or an American Christian or a Sudanese Christian or a Malaysian Christian, you're not a Christian Malaysian. The first identity is we are Christians. And there are over 2 billion of us all around the world. And we all belong to Christ.

And from the beginning, Peter's communities suffered from rejection and harassment, by their society around them, because their Christian identity made them suspect. They messed up the whole understanding of society. When they got together, they had slaves and aristocrats sharing the Eucharist. They had foreigners sharing the Eucharist. They had people from good backgrounds and backgrounds sharing the Eucharist. That was not the way you did it. It's not how you lived in those days. And so the letter shows that when we are faithful, we will find we are exiles.

And so a lot of the letter and particularly the more controversial bits are about how to be faithful and still to survive. Many people in this room understand that test. This tension runs through out the letter, the exiles are identified as chosen, destined and sanctified by Christ, their exiles where they live, but in God's eyes, they are indigenous to heaven. They are indigenous to heaven as we are. And this identity just goes right through the letter. The Spirit is working in them to make them holy. And they are called to be pilgrims to journey with Christ together and First Peter is, in many places a text that for many of our years is startling. It's difficult to hear, we'll get to the difficult bits about slavery, migration, social identity, exclusion and suffering. And the aim of this time together, is to hear and then discuss and work together, and to be faithful to the text and what it teaches us, because it has a richness and depth, which will teach us enormously if we let it and a compelling message concerning the transforming joy of Jesus Christ, which leads us into being the sort of church that we ought to be. For many of us, Peter touches on difficult topics, and we are not going to skip them, we're going to talk about them. And so you'll hear many voices on the screen, talking about the difficult bits and difficult issues.

We're going to listen to each other, and to hear and learn how different communities have different understandings of key themes in 1st Peter. And we are going to be as clear as possible, to be honest with each other, to walk in humility, and in the light. And we're going to try and do what Peter says, to have a spirit of honesty, encouragement, gentleness, and humility, for that is the only way we can work together. So let's move on to the text.

1 Peter 1 sets the tone for the whole letter. Those called exiles in 1 Peter 1 verse 2, are immediately called chosen, destined and sanctified. They are the communities of 1 Peter, they have experienced or they are experiencing persecution. Peter exhorts Christians in Diaspora in dispersion, to put their faith in God and not lose hope, in an environment of despair, and suspicion and hostility. One of the key aspects of one Peter is how it expresses hope to those who are being persecuted. Let us be clear, in this hall, many live in places of persecution, some of it violent and open, some of it slightly better concealed. And it is difficult for those who do not experience persecution, to understand the reality of the recipients of this letter. And there is a big danger of us being more willing to judge Peter for what he says without considering his context. But we are not here to judge Peter for what he writes. We are here to listen and to apply hermeneutical skills to understand why and what this means for us today.

Hope is the second theme. The first one is alienation and persecution. We'll hear more about that in a minute. Hope is the second theme. Hope cannot be separated in Peter, from the life and death of Jesus Christ. It's not the same as optimism. David Porter the Chief of Staff at Lambeth often quotes a minister in Northern Ireland, during the troubles the fighting in Northern Ireland, who when he had a meeting, he'd come out and the journalists would say, Minister, are you optimistic? And he'd say no, but I am hopeful. He was a Christian. He understood the difference.

Hope is not what we have, it's what God has for us. It is in heaven, waiting for us. It's what we know we're going to get, it's not based on wishful thinking or fantasy. It's not based on propaganda from the Roman Empire, or those who claim to have Gods or authority. We are both reformed, and Catholic and in the Reformation we learned, forgive me, my dear brothers and sisters, but bishops don't always get it right. We just need to remember that we sometimes get it wrong. Even Archbishops!

And the result of that is, we come under scripture, hope, can confront death and despair only when it is based not on what a human says. But what God says. It's not based in our own actions or our personal piety. It is everything to do with what Jesus has done. Many in our communion have to struggle to hold on to hope - someone the other day was saying to me, that in the province that they lead, that they serve and lead people are drifting away, in some cases from the church, as a result of 15 years of war. They're saying - 25 years of war, I think, they're saying, we pray, but there is still war, how can we still hope? And the answer is because the hope is in the life and death of Jesus Christ. And so many of us so many of you are experiencing enormous suffering, cyclones, three cyclones in two months in Madagascar and southeast Africa at the end of last year, race based violence, persecution, gender, violence.

Rebirth, and resurrection is the third theme, the movement from death to life for us, which we've been singing about in our wonderful worship, the movement from death to life, is utterly bound up with us being in Christ, we will have life we have life now, we hope for life eternal, because only of Jesus. I know something about many people in this room, but I know one thing about everyone who follows Christ, not just in this room, but in the world, that they will have eternal life because only of Jesus Christ, and they have contributed nothing to that fact. It is all God's work.

This rebirth in Christ moves us from no hope, to hope, from ignorance to knowledge, from disobedience to obedience.

And then fourth theme, we know joy. Personally, I find this one of the hardest things to engage with, because we all have different personalities. I was talking about one of the bishops spouses earlier, who is just someone who bounces everywhere. They're just constantly bouncing. They are full of joy. There's a series of children's books in England called Winnie the Pooh. And Rowan Williams said, every human situation can be explained with the hermeneutical tools of Winnie the Pooh. And in Winnie the Pooh in one of the characters in the book is a tiger called Tigger. Some people are Tiggers they bounce everywhere. Some people like me, are Eeyores, we have our heads down. If one thing goes wrong, we think oh, that's normal. What's the next thing to go wrong? And it's part of our personality.

But joy in Christ is something else. When we worship and we sing what God has done for us, do we remember the joy? Some years ago, many years ago, I met in Switzerland, a Cardinal, first Cardinal I'd ever met, I've met more sense and then wonderful. Cardinal van Thuan. He died. He went to be with the Lord some years ago. But I met him he'd been Archbishop in South Vietnam and what is now Ho Chi Minh City was then Saigon, when the Communists took over in 1975, I think it was, and he was arrested. And he was held for nine years in solitary confinement. At some point, his his writing, and his books are so beautiful, and they are on hope. And they're on joy. And he talked, I was with him with a friend of mine for the afternoon, he was giving a lecture in the evening, and we spent the afternoon I just listened.

He spoke of his experience of nine years of torture, in solitary confinement, how his torturer had become a Christian, and ended up in prison with him how he'd started at the seminary in the prison, where the lectures were given by whispering down the line when the prisoners were being counted, and so on, I won't get carried away. And he told how in his prison, in his cell by himself underground. He said mass every day, with one grain of rice.

And enough rice wine smuggled in, to hold just in the palm of his hand, which was the chalice. And as he said, the mass he danced with joy. He danced with joy, at his salvation, joy, whether focused on Christ, those suffering now are assured of the work of God to bring new life in which our past is forgiven. Our present is protected, and our future eternally is assured. Christ's suffering and glory serve as the example and encouragement to these exiled Christians. Christ's suffering and self sacrifice, are the foundations of the fifth theme, which is the call to holiness in 1 Peter, Peter goes back and back and echoes Leviticus. He calls us to holiness, to imitate God, in God's self sacrificial movement towards us in Jesus Christ. God is holy and we are called to be holy. And this holiness is not something we can control, or earn. It is an invitation, and a gift.

And Peter sets that out beautifully in chapter 2, which we will see I think on Monday. And Peter says that wonderful phrase: you will all remember that God's gifts are better than gold or silver. They never perish, spoil or fade. They are the one thing like that they are the only things we carry with us before beyond the grave. When we stand before Christ, in judgement, facing judgement, our Lord and Saviour will not be interested in whether we were bishops or archbishops or bishop's spouses or whatever. Uninterested, he will want to know 'do you love me? Did you say Jesus is Lord?' It's all that matters. The person sleeping on the street is just as important as any of us. And there is as a result of those wonderful themes that will come through the book. There is a sense of journey and growth across 1 Peter.

In many parts of our world, and in many parts of the church, there's a sense that once you're converted, baptised, that's it. Peter says 'no it's not' - and his theme was picked up in the early church, particularly Irenaeus and Origen, said that formation, journeying, growing, learning. Remember in John, Jesus says, the Holy Spirit will be leading you into all truth. And for Origen and Irenaeus and the other Christians of the era of great persecution the moment of conversion was rarely important before you were converted, before you were formed, it was the most dangerous moment where you might regret it, you might be knocked off your faith where you might slip and fall back. Because the new convert was exposed to threats from the world, the flesh and the devil.

So one of the challenges of this passage is to ask how we draw people into growth in Christ throughout their lives. And in every diocese, that is the greatest challenge for us, draw the flock to grow in Christ throughout their lives and as a result, many of the verbs in one Peter in the Greek are active verbs. They assume an action is ongoing, becoming living stones, becoming examples to the flock, casting our anxieties on God.

We are united in our hope, in our love for Jesus. Absolutely. But as a church in common, by the way with every global church, we are also divided by the assumption that the key themes of 1 Peter mean the same for everyone. That my suffering is exactly the same as your suffering. But it is not and that is why we must come together and listen to one another, and walk with one another and learn from one another. Because the same words mean different things to different people. Empathy, the word that means walking in one another's shoes is much harder than judgement. It is easy to condemn, it is hard to tell the story of someone we disagree with, in a way that they recognise it as their story. How can we walk and witness together if we do not know each other's stories?

All these scenes of hope, put so beautifully and movingly by such a vast range of people in contexts of suffering, joy, despair, holiness, exile, transformation. They are all attributed to the apostle Peter. And that cannot be a coincidence. Peter's story embodies all these themes. The same Peter, who denied Christ is the one commissioned, forgiven and called to tend the flock. And when Jesus meets him on the beach of the Sea of Galilee, he does not say, 'Peter, you've done so well, since you denied me that you've earned your way'. He simply says 'do you love me?' Peter is also a model of lived suffering. He knows about alienation and the longing we have to belong.

Jesus called Peter to follow Him in His ministry, and Peter volunteered to do so. But he failed, and ended up denying Jesus three times. He suffered from isolation and alienation when he separated himself from Christ. By denying him, Peter struggled with what it means to follow Christ. Go back to John chapter 13, and you find him struggling - 'what wash my feet, you'll never wash my feet!' And Jesus says, if you want to belong to me, I must wash your feet. We know Peter before the resurrection, a Peter who suffers, who is judge who failed, who lacked understanding, and saw at least one of his fellow disciples, not as a brother in Christ, but as a competitor. But we also know Peter after the resurrection, the first one called by Christ, to tend my sheep. He offers us a model of lived suffering, he offers the model of ultimately giving his life for Christ, in his life, and in his death. He is one who knows about alienation, and the longing, we have to be one with Christ.

And that's why 1 Peter speaks to our stories, when like, Peter, we suffer, we judge, we compete, we fail to follow faithfully, and yet we are called by Christ to tend flock of God. Peter upsets power dynamics, he calls us to listen to those whose experiences much closer to what he experienced, than in our world today. It's striking how many in the conversations feel that one Peter speaks directly to them, Bishop Azad from Pakistan, Archbishop Hosam, from Jerusalem. For as much as we are called to hope in one Peter, hope and alienation, hope and suffering are opposite sides of the coin.

Psychologically, it kills you, as we listen to the various voices, we hear such different understandings, all based in scripture or based in experience, but such different understandings of the words hope and alienation?

You know, we here in the global north in England, we continually need to remind ourselves we know, but we forget that the Bible may be written in English, but it is not an English book. It was written over a period of a millennium, 1000 years across. Across huge difference in circumstances, by people inspired by the Spirit of God. And when it is read, in different circumstances, people hear words in their own language, they hear them in a different sense. So why 1 Peter, why 1 Peter at this time?Â Because we need each other. Because we need each other.

We aren't perfect. But we are called to walk together, to witness together, and to listen together in Christ. Many in our world today are alienated like the communities of 1 Peter. And we are called to listen and support them. When we get to 1 Peter 5 there's the call to solidarity with brothers and sisters in Christ. And the understandings and experience of exile and alienation with brothers and sisters in the Anglican Communion are innumerable. And all different. 1 Peter calls his communities to live as God's chosen people - those who are excluded, marginalised, unheard are God's people. That's us here. And all we know and love in our church. We are God's people called to embrace our common call to hope in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But we are undeniably divided. Who is included or excluded from our communities? Who are the aliens and the exiles is different from province to province diocese, to diocese. How we think about hope, is different. We've just heard that, I am convinced that with any of these key themes, holiness, suffering, persecution, rebirth, salvation, hospitality, we can find disagreement.

Disagreement does not matter. But we see in one Peter, and right through the New Testament, that division does matter. It is not the gospel. Peter ends the first chapter by telling us that the message shared is the good news that was announced to them. And it is the good news of Jesus Christ, which is their foundation of their life together. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Living Hope. There's no other means of getting that hope.

It is the way in which we are able to stand firm against all that brings death in individual lives and communities in the world. The Gospel of Christ that we proclaim, the hope that we embody is good news, not just for us, but for all God's people. The call to us, across the whole Catholic Church, the global Church, - I'm not just talking about Anglicans - is to stop our civil wars. There are enough in the world without having them in the church.

And the good news is that when we are one in Christ, divisions between Christians of all shapes and sizes remain, disagreements remain but divisions are robbed of power.

The power of Christ overcomes all that seeks to alienate, to fragment, to make for fear. We may be disparate, we are divided, but we have a common identity that is over everything, that we belong to Jesus Christ. Our identity is found in Christ. Our mission is God's mission. Our hope is living and alive not stagnant and stale. What is the good news that you bring to this gathering? How might you be open to encountering the good news of Jesus Christ here? For that, openness, listening, learning, walking, witnessing together, is how we will meet the aim of this conference: to meet Christ, to encounter Christ, and that's what we seek now, as we meet together in our Bible study groups.

Let us pray. Oh Lord, who preserves for us the gift of hope stored up for us in heaven. Enable us to come with humble hearts and open spirits that your spirit through each other may fill us and guide us together. Amen

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**Through prayer, Bible study, fellowship and discussion, the conference community will explore what it means for the Anglican Communion to be responsive to the needs of our 21st Century world. Read 1 Peter and find out more about the theme and biblical focus [here](#).**

18 min read

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