

"Escape"

Text: 2 Peter 1:2-11

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in Christ Jesus, our Savior, and may you never know a moment's doubt that the debt of your sins has already been paid in full, and that through faith in Jesus you have been rescued from an eternity of unspeakable torment. Amen.

Dear Fellow Servants of Jesus Christ:

"Escape" is admittedly a rather vague sermon title. The word itself can be a noun or a verb. It can be used as a command or in reference to a vacation. It is most often used to describe something good, as in some sort of release from captivity or danger.

This morning I want you to think of *escape* first in this context: In 1968 a 20 year old student at Emory College, Barbara Mackle, was kidnapped from her dorm room, carried to an abandoned, overgrown homestead northeast of Atlanta, GA and buried alive in a coffin-sized plywood box, several feet underground. The small light she had been given failed almost immediately, so she spent the next four days and three nights in utter darkness, unable to fully extend her legs and with the ceiling of her tomb just a few inches above her face. Her only connection to the world above her tomb was a small air tube.

This is the sort of escape – or *need for escape* - that we are talking about. The connection and application to our text for this morning will become more apparent as we hear of another harrowing, life and death need for escape – our own. That part of God's Word that will instruct us this morning is the inspired Word of God recorded in 2 Peter, the First Chapter:

^{ESV} **2 Peter 1:2-11** *May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. ³ ¶ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from*

being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹ For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

These are the inspired words of our God. That we might not simply hear these words and forget them, but rather be strengthened, comforted, and grow through their study, so we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

It is my experience that one of the greatest obstacles that prevents a greater appreciation for the gospel of Jesus Christ is our dismal lack of appreciation for the predicament in which we found ourselves, and the escape that was necessary if we were to avoid an eternity of unspeakable torment in hell. This, therefore, has to be our starting point this morning. My prayer is that no one will leave this service this morning without a greater understanding of, and appreciation for, both the horror of our imprisonment and the absolutely incredible escape in which you and I have participated.

Obviously we can draw certain comparisons and contrasts between that poor woman buried in a plywood box and our own terrifying predicament. While she was held by human captors, we were held by Satan himself. Where she was powerless to overpower her captors; we had no will or strength even to resist, let alone to escape on our own. In fact where most prisoners can find something to do to work toward their own escape, we could do absolutely nothing to work toward our own release – there was simply nothing available for us even to try.

Stop for a moment and contemplate the true horror of your own dilemma, your own incarceration or imprisonment. You absolutely had to escape, and yet you were absolutely powerless to take even the simplest steps to secure your freedom. In fact the harder you tried, the more impossibly tangled you became in your own sinfulness.

Hopefully we are beginning to get a much better picture of the helplessness and sheer terror of our captivity in unbelief. But it gets even worse. Not only were we buried and utterly helpless in our own box of unbelief, we had absolutely no sense or idea of the danger we were in. None whatsoever. Satan is a master at that – at convincing

his captives that what they really have is freedom, at imagining that all is well.

Can you imagine any scenario, any situation in which that woman buried in that box would actually *want to be there*? Any situation where when rescuers came to free her she would wave them off with an *"I'm fine, thanks anyway."* That's unbelief. That was you. Those who live in true freedom through faith in Jesus Christ could recognize the terror of your situation; you could not.

Understand that it is absolutely necessary that you and I come to terms with our former situation, because it is really not until you come to terms with such horror, helplessness, apathy and impending calamity that you can begin to appreciate the impact of the words of our text that describe your release, your escape: ***"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."***

Savor these words. Study them. Wrap yourself in them. Meditate on them until the full force of their message envelops your very soul. What is it that brought about our escape? Peter tells us that it was through ***"his precious and very great promises"*** that we have been released from the prison of our own unbelief. This is purest, sweetest gospel. While our God certainly delights in obedience, we were powerless to supply the sort of obedience that was demanded for our release - our escape from the prison of our own sinfulness. The Law demanded *perfect* obedience in every way and at all times. Since we could never supply such perfection, we needed someone else to provide us with an escape. But by what means? Our text teaches us that it was by ***"precious and very great promises."*** The ***promises*** mentioned here stand in stark contrast to the "do it yourself" mentality of work righteousness. All but the Christian religion are based on an "earn your own way into eternity" mindset. All but true Christianity teach that *you* must provide your own escape through your own efforts. Christianity alone teaches that our only means of escape is through faith in the promise that a Savior has done for us what we could not and would not do for ourselves. By keeping the law perfectly in our place, Jesus carried us to freedom by earning the forgiveness for our sins through his death on the cross. Your escape has been accomplished by Jesus Christ. His perfect life and innocent death dug you out of your tomb of unbelief and set you free. Jesus Christ was our only hope, and he did for us what no one else could ever do.

While this is certainly reason enough to thrill to the message of our text, but don't miss the other incredible proclamations found here. Here we also learn that not only has Jesus made a way of escape for every single prisoner, by ***"his own glory and excellence"*** he has also made us ***"partakers of the divine nature."***

I'm not sure we can come up with a parallel to this truth in the secular world. Nothing on earth can even begin to compare to the change that has already taken place in every single Christian in connection with our great escape. Through faith in the promise of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, we not only escape eternal damnation, we are made ***"partakers of the divine nature."*** That means that we have been made brothers and co-heirs together with the One who rescued us. It refers not only to the new man that has been created in us, but also to the fact that we will one day share in the glory of heaven. God now lives *in us*. Having been rescued from the box of our own unbelief, we are now different people than when we were in that box.

Simply put, these words assure every single Christian that not only have we been lifted above the filth and perversion of this world, we will also reign with Christ Jesus in all eternity. What powerful, comforting, invigorating and uplifting facts are here revealed to us. Thanks be to God, who gives us such a victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is where we are now, but what about the future. Could you imagine anyone, having been rescued from the unspeakable horror of being buried alive, ever wanting to be returned to that dreadful place and condition? I could – on Judgment Day. Compared to hell, being buried alive would look pretty good. That's exactly what Jesus was talking about when he said that on Judgment Day the godless would be begging the mountains to fall on them, and for the hills to cover them. No one would ask for such a thing unless the only other option was unspeakably worse.

Peter is well aware that, as ridiculous as it may sound, Christians are nonetheless very capable of foolishness on an even greater scale. Having been freed from the devil's dungeons, Christians down through history have inexplicably returned to the very pit of despair from which they had been rescued. How could such a thing happen?

In most cases, the faith that was created in their hearts – the very thing that brought about their escape – that same faith was abused and starved, literally to death. Such things don't tend to happen all at once; they occur gradually – almost imperceptibly. It usually begins

with a sense of apathy and complacency in the heart of a child of God. Sin is tolerated and allowed to eat away at our souls. Church attendance becomes sporadic, and then ends altogether. The tender plant that is a new Christian faith is never watered with the Word of God. The Christian does not grow in his knowledge and understanding of God's Word, and he begins to wither and fade. Before he knows it, he finds himself right back in the box – and is inexplicably fine with that.

There is no doubt that we are saved by faith; yet the point that the Holy Spirit drives home to us in the second half of our text is the terrible fact that Christians can surrender again to Satan. They then find themselves entombed all over again in that place of utter despair and hopelessness. In fact there is no greater tragedy than when a human soul, once rescued by our Lord Jesus through saving faith, is recaptured by the devil because of the Christian's spiritual negligence and apathy. Clearly the Holy Spirit does not want such a thing to ever happen, let alone happen regularly. He therefore gave us these amazing words of wisdom in our text: **"Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."** We are then given an astonishing promise that you and I don't want to miss: **"Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall."** This is actually a spectacular promise from our God. In effect he is telling us: *"You want to keep from ever becoming entombed again? Here's how you access the power that guarantees that you will never lose the freedom you now have."*

It is certainly no secret to anyone here that we are not saved by what we do, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So also our text assures us: **"For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."** Our salvation is a gift from our God, yet how foolish to reject the wisdom and encouragement of our God regarding the care and maintenance of the saving faith that he has created in us. How foolish to risk recapture by abusing the means of grace that have been provided for us by our Savior God.

God grant to each of us this morning a full and complete understanding of the horror of the captivity that was once ours, the grace to thrill to the escape that has been provided for every single one of us by God's undeserved love through faith in Jesus Christ alone, astonishment at the

change that has been worked in us, and the humble wisdom to make use of the power he has placed at our disposal to preserve us in the freedom we now have. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-9** "And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. ² You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you... ⁶ Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? ⁸ And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? ⁹ ¶ "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children.

ESV **Ephesians 6:10-20** Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

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Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

The 14th Sunday after Pentecost – August 30, 2015

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 353 (Verses 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Savior Blest"

The Order of Morning Service – Red Hymnal page 5.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back of the bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9) We are here reminded that obedience to God's Commandments is always pleasing to our God. Why would we need to be reminded of such things? Because those who know and believe that they are saved by grace through faith can expect to be targeted by Satan. The devil would love for us to come to believe that disobedience is now acceptable to God, since we are saved by faith in Jesus and not by our own works. Surely the new man in us longs to walk in harmony with God's will, despite the persuasive urgings of our sinful flesh..

The Epistle Lesson: (Ephesians 6:10-20) Although keeping the commandments is certainly pleasing to our God, our second lesson reminds us that it is not our actions that save or protect us. Such gifts come always and only from our God, through His power and by His mercy. In this reading we are reminded of the unique, spiritual armor that our God has prepared to preserve us in this one true saving faith. How foolish to fail to make use of these gifts, or to ignore this protection in the face of such danger.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn - 430 (Verses 1-6, 8) (Red Hymnal)

"What Is the World to Me?"

The Sermon - Text: 2 Peter 1:2-11 (Printed on the back page)

"Escape"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 234 (Red Hymnal)

"Holy Ghost with Light Divine"

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Closing Hymn – 353 (Verses 6-7) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Savior Blest"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with congregations throughout the United States, as well as mission affiliates scattered around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance - Sunday (61) Average (52)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:30 a.m.	– Annual Church Picnic
	-7:00 p.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Teaching Program Graduate Leah Ude has returned the call to serve as pre-school teacher at Redeemer of Cheyenne, WY. The CLC Board of Missions has called Pastor Peter Evensen to serve in the foreign mission field of India.

Church Picnic – The annual Church Picnic is scheduled for this morning after the worship service. A shelter at Hillside Park has been reserved. If you need directions please see Cindy Ollenburger. This event, though scheduled months ago, was carefully coordinated to fall on what promises to be one of the hottest days of the year.

Church Work – Several projects in and around the church are still looking for volunteers. Most of the items are fairly quick and easy and can be completed during the week, as individual schedules allow. Please consult the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table and volunteer as you are able.

Church Council Meeting – The monthly meeting of the Church Council is scheduled for this evening at 7 pm. Please bring any agenda items to the attention of a Council member prior to the meeting.