

**“Taking the Long View”**  
**1 Peter 1:1-9**  
**Andrew Foster Connors**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Easter**  
**April 23, 2017**

Peter writes to churches in Asia Minor - modern day Turkey - to encourage them in what seems like a hostile social situation.

These communities were comprised by resident aliens who had traveled from their homeland through a vast Greco-Roman network of roads in search of economic opportunity. There were Diaspora Jews who had come to believe that Jesus was Messiah as well as Gentiles who had come to believe in the one God of Israel revealed to Gentiles in Jesus Christ.

These exiles, as Peter calls them, stood out from their neighbors. They were culturally and ethnically different. They were outsiders. We used to think these Christians were under constant persecution. Indeed, some Christians were martyred. Some were persecuted. But more recent scholarship reveals no empire-wide persecution of Christians, nor systematic oppression at the local level. What you had was Christians who were not citizens of the empire. Their legal status was not protected which made them more vulnerable to abusive treatment by neighbors and by those in power at the local level. Even though they paid taxes, they didn't have the legal protections that citizens enjoyed. Persecutions, then, broke out when they were politically expedient.<sup>1</sup> When Rome burned, Nero blamed the Christians.

This is a book written to immigrants who don't have a home in empire. It's a book understood by undocumented immigrants in the US who know that fear that each day could be the day that ICE picks them up and sends them home. It's a book understood by non-white citizens of our country who have been verbally attacked and told to "go home" while walking in their neighborhoods or pumping gas at the filling station. It's a situation understood by Muslims feared because of their head scarf, or non-European-Americans treated as if they don't belong because of their physical features, or anyone whose accent is different from the dominant ones where they live. It's a book understood by African-Americans in our country who despite legal equality under the law, still get treated differently, stopped for driving or shopping while black, or much worse. And it's a book written to any Christian whose faith has made them stand out, kept them from belonging, excluded them from power.

It's a book, then, that will be less accessible to someone like me because of the privilege that surrounds me by virtue of my skin color, my gender, and my sexual orientation. I've had taillights out, but never been stopped for it. I've never had the police pull over to ask me what I was doing in the neighborhood. No one has ever yelled at me to "go back to Mexico or China or India" while pumping gas or walking through a neighborhood where most of the people living there appeared to

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Judith Jones for reminding me of the historical situation,  
[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3236](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3236)

be from an ethnic background different from my own. I have never offered an idea in a group that was ignored when it came out of my mouth but listened to when someone else of a different gender shared the same thing. When I was awakened to this reality some time ago I realized very quickly that if I had any hope of understanding this God of exiles and outcasts, I was going to have to learn to do two things – become an extraordinary listener and put my body in places where I could better understand life experiences that I am not likely to have on my own.

One of the things I've learned is how much people not like me have to fight to preserve your innate dignity through these assaults on your humanity. "As a Black person growing up in this culture," a friend shared recently, "sometimes you're not always sure in a given moment if you are experiencing someone else's racism, or your own internal voice that says you are not good enough, which is also the product of that same culture of racism."

It's those kinds of experiences that make Peter's words extraordinary. To a people who long for a fair chance, an opportunity – God has already turned the tables and birthed you into that hope. To a people who sometimes doubt their value, Jesus has chosen *you*. To a people vulnerable to the whims of those in power, *you've* been given an inheritance, one that is imperishable, that can't be taken away. For a people lacking in the basic protections, God's power is in the process of saving you.

Perhaps that sounds foolish in these times that some have already labeled the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reconstruction. When things that were unspeakable several years ago because they were considered racist, are resurging. When bipartisan hope for immigration reform has disappeared. When refugees have shifted from being seen as victims of war to threats to national security. Perhaps it sounds foolish.

Or maybe you have to take a longer view to see it. Dr. Soong-Chan Rah, lecturing at the NEXT Church National Gathering last month, pointed out that in 2011 more than 50% of births in the US were children of non-European descent. In 2016, not surprisingly, the incoming kindergarten class in American was majority non-European. In 2042, if demographic trends continue, more than 50% of America will be made up of people of non-European descent. Dr. Rah said, forget the wall along the Mexican border. Let's get Canada to pay for a dome so that no one can come into the US just for argument's sake. Even if we do that, we will still see the browning of America.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Rah went on to juxtapose majority white churches that are shrinking and dying on the whole with immigrant and non-white churches that are growing, on the whole. Christianity in America, Dr. Rah argued, is being saved by minority groups – by immigrants who are on the losing side today, by minorities who are on the losing side today, by non-Europeans who are on the losing side today. God is saving the faith through them, if you take the long view. To a people who sometimes doubt their value, Jesus has chosen *you*. To a people vulnerable to the whims of those in power, *you've* been given an inheritance, one that is imperishable, that can't be taken away. For a people lacking in the basic protections, God's power is in the process of saving you.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://nextchurch.net/2017-national-gathering-keynote-soong-chan-rah/>

You have to take the long view. The community that produced this book had to take the long view. The earliest epistles in the Bible spoke of the imminent return of Christ. Jesus was coming back tomorrow. Don't get married, Paul said, because Jesus is on his way back. Don't get too attached to anything thing or any place – Jesus will be here soon. Peter is written a few generations later when the community is realizing they have to take a longer view.

Taking the long view isn't always a good idea. It can cause you to be numb to the present, to accept present realities than need to be changed. This is true. But what would our nation be like if we took the long view when it came to racial justice and equality? Striving again to work together on the racial wealth and education gaps. The day after Earth Day, what would our environment look like if we took the long view on our care for the earth instead of the short view of quick profits by any means necessary? What would the nations look like if we took the long view on the awful consequences of war instead of being lulled into short-term temptations of victory through violence? How would you be different if you took a long view of your life instead of frantically scrambling to pull together next week's schedule?

The church itself is God's version of the long view. A 2000 year-old community organized around a human being we've not yet seen face to face. One we profess to love and serve even though we've never held his hand, seen his face, heard the tone of his voice. And it's that faith – one that is lived in the absence of short-term satisfaction, hope that is refined in the absence of short-term victory – it's that faith that God uses to save the world.

The Message translation puts it this way: “pure gold put in the fire comes out of it *proved* pure; genuine faith put through this suffering comes out *proved* genuine.”<sup>3</sup> In the long view, God may just be purifying the church that is needed to lead us out of this exile. A church of resident aliens, of immigrants, of every race and nation. A people who've been given an inheritance, one that is imperishable, that can't be taken away.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+peter+1%3A1-9&version=MSG>