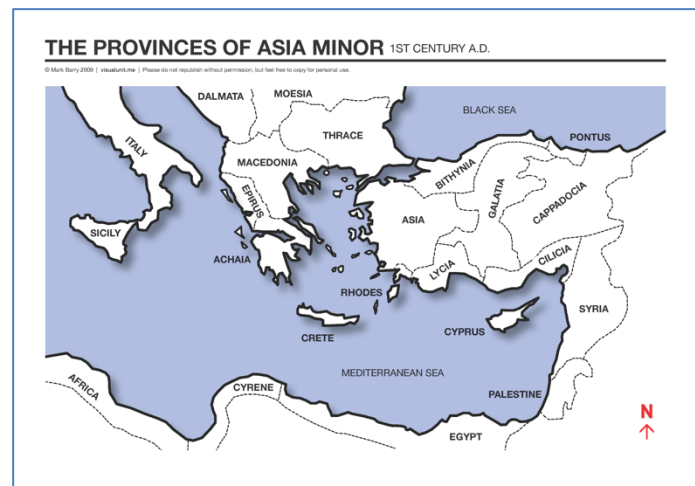


Today we embark on a 6-week sermon series that will lay the groundwork for our new vision that your Elders have adopted and presented to you all. If you have not picked up the one-page document that explains that vision, then I encourage you to do so; it’s also on our website – [www.rosehill.church](http://www.rosehill.church). This series that we’re in will be based on the New Testament book of 1 Peter. We won’t be going through it systematically like we often do when going through a book, but taking different parts of it each week, regardless.

The inspiration for this series comes from a book called, “Evangelism as Exiles: Life on Mission as Strangers in Our Own Land.” Someone this week asked me, “**What does this phrase ‘Evangelism as exiles’ mean?**” **And in a nutshell, I would say it means: “Intentionally living and sharing your faith in a context where we Christians are in the minority.”** And so, this book, the class that goes with it on Sundays, the book of 1 Peter, this sermon series, and our new vision, are all wrapped around that theme. It’s literally five different things all pulling together in the same direction to give us a bit of a shift and a focus as a congregation on what it means to be Christians and intentionally live out our faith where live, work, and play.

The first verse of 1 Peter lets us know who the letter is written to: scattered believers throughout what is now Turkey (**Map**), on the northeast edge of the Mediterranean Sea. 1 Peter 1:1 reads, “**...To God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia...**” (1 Peter 1:1).



So right off the bat, we know the regions in which these people live, and we know that their lives as Christians are not easy: they are exiles. They do not

live in Christendom. In fact, some 16 times in this letter, Peter references their suffering and difficult circumstances because of their faith. In other words: being a Christian goes against the prevailing culture. Sound familiar? We see this reiterated in some of Paul's letters, as well, which also identify challenges to being Jesus followers in the culture they find themselves in – and some of those churches he wrote to are in this same geographical region, such as Ephesus, Philippi, and Galatia.

**Into this difficult cultural situation, however, Peter writes of hope.** John 11, the passage we looked at the last three Sundays, centers on that same theme, and so 1 Peter really flows right out of what we've most recently been in. Today's message is titled, "The Hope of Glory" primarily to coincide with the title of the first chapter in the book. But I'm not actually going to spend much time there, because he mostly draws on other biblical passages outside of 1 Peter to lay the groundwork for this. But, in a nutshell: Elliot Clark cites a number of verses in Scripture to point out that the glory we hope for is not just to glorify God, but also our glory; That God, in the end, glorifies us. It's not what we usually think of with that word, but it is Biblical – both in this life and the life to come. We'll come back to it some at the end.

Then he makes a couple of observations about sharing our faith, that I think resonate with many of us when it comes to sharing our faith. He says in the first chapter, **"Shame and the fear of exclusion combine like nothing else to quench our spirit for evangelism"** (**"Evangelism as Exiles," p. 34**). He says that: "The dominant reason for our lack of evangelism in America isn't the fear of death. We aren't in danger of being imprisoned or tortured... We face being ignored or excluded. We face ridicule or reviling. If we open our mouths with the gospel, we run the risk of others thinking we're closed-minded or unloving" He goes on to say, "It may not be overt persecution that crushes your spirit or tamps down your witness; it can simply be the shame of having those closest to you consider you to be foolish, ignorant, arrogant, misguided, or a prude. Or it can be the threat of isolation, of being perpetually uninvited, unrecognized, or unwanted. Shame and the fear of exclusion combine like nothing else to quench our spirit of evangelism" (**Evangelism as Exiles, p. 33-34**).

**My guess is that many of us resonate with that.** Will my friends and neighbors think I'm a fool if they know I follow Jesus – and that I wish they did as well? Will my co-workers still invite me to join them at lunch if they know I'm a Jesus follower – and that I wish they'd give Jesus a chance, too? (I'm especially concerned about some of my co-workers, with this, like Rob. ☺) Will anyone still like me if I try and share my faith, or will I end up all alone with no friends, no social life, ashamed of what I believe? So: **How can we overcome that fear, and live out/share our faith in such a way that people might actually be attracted to it, and not completely reject us as friends if they aren't attracted to it?** What can motivate us to be freer, and more open and authentic about our true selves, our true identity, as disciples of Jesus?

Today's passage helps with this. Let's read **1 Peter 3:13-18** and see what we can glean from it to help us in sharing our faith. **(Read passage.)** So, in this passage we get a glimpse of the fact that these early Christians to whom he's writing are suffering for their faith. And in the face of this, there are two things that help as an antidote to the fear and the shame we might have. Here's the first: In verse 15, Peter writes, **“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord” (1 Peter 3:15a)**. This is the starting point.

When Scripture speaks elsewhere of things such as, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” this is what it's getting at. Revere Christ as Lord. Be in awe of Jesus. That's where we start: Jesus is Lord. Not just Lord of our hearts and our lives, though certainly that is true. But it's important to recognize Jesus as Lord of the universe, the one through whom all things were made, who holds all time in his hands, who, along with the Spirit and God the Father holds the keys to our eternal destiny. It is better to revere, or even fear, him, than others who don't have that same power and authority.

**We can be motivated by the fact that in the long run, he's the one we serve, because he's the one who will bring us into glory, the thing we hope for.** So, Jesus is the one we want to please. Jesus is the one we want to be in solid relationship with. Jesus is the one we want to be concerned about “shame and the fear of exclusion.” And our response might be, “Well, Jesus never leaves us. He never abandons us. You preached that last week, Pastor,

that when life gets stinky Jesus doesn't walk away from us." And that's true. But the mark of one who is *with* Jesus to begin with is one who *does his will*. It's one who puts his words into practice. Jesus says so himself, a number of times.

So, to revere Christ as Lord, as this verse commands us to do, is not just to say, "Jesus is Lord" but then live otherwise; **To "revere" Jesus as Lord is to live out what we say we believe.** To live his commands out. To be Christ-like in our living. To model our lives after his. And the central message of Jesus' life – in his actions and in his teachings – is about the centrality and importance of Jesus. Jesus puts himself at the center of his teaching about what it means to live by faith in God. Living in such a way as to make it clear and obvious to the world that Jesus is at the center of our lives, Lord of our lives, because he's Lord of eternity, is the number one thing for us to do. So, let's say that Jesus is Lord, and then live like it's true, and in doing that we will revere Jesus as Lord.

That leads us right in to the second point. **"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander"** (1 Peter 3:15-16).

So, like last week, we see the central role of "hope" in our faith. In the midst of whatever we're facing – whether it's slander, people who drop us as friends, whether it's people who think we're foolish for believing that a well-organized universe has an organizer and his name is Jesus, financial crisis, health concerns – whatever it is that we're facing, we have hope because of Jesus. He will carry us through, he will deliver us from evil, he will welcome us with open arms and if we've served him well, he will one day say to us "Well done, good and faithful servant."

So: **There's a light at the end of the tunnel, and Jesus is that light, and that gives us hope.** It's at the core of what it means to follow Jesus. And Peter says that we should always be prepared to give an answer to everyone

who asks you about *why you live with hope*. Right here is the crux of sharing your faith as exiles. Our hope – the hope of our own glory, of being raised up to new life with Jesus – that hope is the crux of inviting others to follow Jesus. But, most of what *I* hear Christians expressing is not hope. They’re expressing despair, frustration, anger, grief, and all kinds of similar emotions. A lot of it is wrapped up in culture wars, politics, the economy, sex, money, power, and all kinds of other things. Christians used to have a lot more influence and power in our nation, and our nation held to Judeo-Christian values that were the underpinning for our society. And that underpinning is being eroded, for sure. And as a result, many Christians have gotten angry and upset and have sought to keep those Christian values at the core of our country by whatever means they can. It only comes off as a power grab, as an attempt to keep our place in society. It doesn’t help that a lot of the tactics and communication used aren’t very gentle or respectful as this verse admonishes us to be. Regardless, the result is: we don’t communicate much about hope in Jesus, and maybe that’s why no one asks us about our faith.

35 years ago Wendy’s asked, “Where’s the Beef?” I’m asking this morning, “Where’s the hope?” **Where are Christians who live with hope for today and tomorrow and for eternity?** Where are Christians who revere Jesus so much that their hope in him is unshakeable...that it radiates out from them and overshadows all the negative stuff going on around us? Do you want to change the world for Christ? Do you want to bring people to Jesus? Do you want to share your faith with others? **Then revere Christ and live out your faith so that your hope for glory is obvious and people will simply ask you about it.** The fears of shame and rejection will fade because your hope will draw people in to find out more. They will *want* to know more about Jesus.

Let’s shift gears for a moment, and then tie all this together. You may have heard this week about Hilaree Nelson, the Seattle-raised gal who died this past week, in a skiing accident on Manaslu peak, near Everest, and the 8<sup>th</sup> tallest in the world. There was a really lovely article about her in the Seattle Times this week,



with a link to a 2019 video of her and her partner climbing a mountain next to Everest that they then skied down – they were the first ever to do that. That mountain is called “Lohtse”. I want to share the last bit of that video with you. After some concluding thoughts from her, it ends with some brief interviews of the Sherpas who helped on that Lohtse climb. They share their name and how many times they’ve summited several of the named peaks there. It’s kind of astounding. And the last guy ends with a question that I want us to leave us with. **Watch this....**

Hilaree said, **“You have to take risks if you want to learn anything about yourself” (Hilaree Nelson)**. I love that line from her. I love all her reflections here. And then you hear from all these Sherpas who’ve taken huge risk a number of times, summiting these peaks so many times. And the question the last guy ends with, “And you?” I just can’t let go of. Or it won’t let go of me. What risks am I taking? What mountain am I trying to summit? Where is my faith leading me?

This new vision we’re stepping into feels like a risk. But you will learn a lot about yourself, and you’ll learn a lot about Jesus and what it means to be his follower. Our level of discipleship will deepen in this. While this new vision is focused on evangelism, the starting place for it is us as disciples of Jesus. We have to be shaped as disciples differently than we have in the past. And that change feels risky; the evangelism feels risky. But God will meet us and be with us. He will be glorified, and ultimately so will we, if we are faithful to do his will. That’s our hope, and it can carry us through the shame and fear of rejection that we may have.

So, I’m all in with this new vision. Your Elders are as well. We’re stepping out to take this risk, trusting Jesus to lead us. As that last Sherpa asked in the video, I now ask, **“And you?”** I hope you’ll take this risk with us. As Hilaree said, you don’t have to climb Lohtse; We’re just asking each of us to learn to be a disciple of Jesus’ in a little different way than perhaps we have before, so that Christ would be more revered by us than before, and the hope that we have would rise up and be visible to the world. Let’s pray...Amen.