

## **1 Peter 1:22-25**

### **Facing mortality**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This year we've had plenty of reminders that life in this world is rather fragile. Like Peter's quote from our second reading, "all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls." The grass and flowers have their time, they may even be rather pretty, but then they are gone.

This service at the close of the year is a chance to reflect on what our lives have looked like so far. We don't know when our time on earth will end, when we will fade like flowers, and so every day is a good day to think about whether we have borne good fruit in our lives. Are we like the fig tree in the gospel reading, just fit to be cut down? Or is there still some hope? Is there still a gardener who thinks they can make something good of us? This change-over to a new calendar is the time to ask the gardener to work in our lives to bring the good that he wants. All the while realising that we don't determine how many more days we have left to do good.

Facing our mortality isn't something we tend to enjoy doing, but it is important. When Peter quotes the saying about the grass withering and flowers falling, he's actually referring back to Isaiah 40. We've had a fair bit from this chapter in recent weeks. This is the same chapter that where God says, "Comfort, comfort, my people; speak tenderly to Jerusalem". This is also the same chapter that has the voice crying in the wilderness, "prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God". Isaiah promises that God's people will be comforted because God has arrived among them. The valleys are lifted up; the mountains and hills made low. The uneven ground made level; the rough places made smooth. The glory of the Lord is revealed, and all people shall see it together.

In the time of Isaiah, when the people were in exile in Babylon, this was indeed good news. The return to Jerusalem won't be forty years of trudging through a desert like in Exodus. The return to Jerusalem will be a pilgrimage along a properly maintained road. And then a voice cries out, "All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it." Perhaps not the most comforting thought. Rejoice that you have been redeemed from captivity; but don't forget that one day you will die.

Now I deliberately didn't finish the quote earlier. Yes, the grass withers, the flowers fade, and our lives are mortal. But the word of the Lord endures forever. That's what we hang on to. All the promises of God. And tonight, I just want to read some of them to you - straight from God's word. The promises that have been true every day of your life so far, and will be true every day to come.

We start with two just a little bit later in Isaiah.

But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint (Isaiah 40:31).

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10).

If we're troubled and lacking peace, we could hear the words of Jesus in John's gospel.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

If we're feeling weary and burdened by everything that's happened this year, then Jesus has something to say to that too.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29).

We also read in Romans 8:28.

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

If we're seeking answers, there's a promise for that too.

Jesus said, "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:9-13)

And finally, the great promise that we are kept safe in God from Romans chapter eight.

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Shall anything separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31-35).

There are so many more verses than that of course. So many promises of God in scripture. But the point is that God's promises are all for our good. God's promises do not wither and fade like flowers. God's promises never fade away. They are eternal because they are the word of our eternal God. So, as we enter a new year, may those promises of God go with you. May the word be your strength and your hope. And may God keep you safe until your earthly journey ends and all his promises to you are fulfilled. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.