

The Third Sunday of Easter • April 30, 2017

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Rev. Braun Campbell

1 Peter 1:17-25 (Luke 24:13-35)

“VDMA”

Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum.

This fall, the iPhone will be 10 years old. Rumors point to Apple releasing a special-edition 10th anniversary iPhone with who-knows-what amazing features. I have no idea what this new iPhone might be, but I find myself sort of already wanting one. How old is your current phone? Do you remember what happened to the one that you had before it, or the one before that? Ten years ago, the world didn't have iPhones; the concept of the “smartphone” wasn't much known beyond tech circles. Twenty-five years ago, most people hadn't even heard of the Internet. Fifty years ago, computers took up as much space as a row of filing cabinets. You might remember a world where you had to use a phone booth to make a call when you were away from your home or office, or when you had to look up movie showtimes in something called a “newspaper.”

What do you remember about moving from the old to the new in your life? The new comes along and promises the hope of a new experience. Whatever's being replaced didn't last. Even if nothing came along to replace it or push it out of your life, it still got old. It might have once been shiny and attractive, but it ended up unwanted, obsolete, or dead. Even the new doesn't stay new forever. In time, it's forgotten. It doesn't last.

Today's epistle reading from 1 Peter is part of a letter that was written for people in need of a lasting hope. In those early decades of Christianity, around thirty years after Jesus' death and resurrection, believers experienced particular suffering as the cost of following Jesus. They probably weren't yet facing the full-scale, official persecutions that would follow, but they still struggled with living in the world as citizens of the Kingdom of God. Peter wrote to the Church of his day to encourage his fellow Christians, pointing them to the hope that they had as people of the resurrection.

Peter pointed people to Jesus, who'd he seen with his own eyes after the resurrection. Peter knew that Jesus wasn't the next new thing; the risen Lord wouldn't fade away and leave his people abandoned. Peter walked and talked and ate with Jesus in those forty days after Easter. Peter heard his Master's command to feed his sheep, to care for all those who would be a part of the body of Christ, the people of his Church. Even in those times when it seemed like the rest of the world would fail them and leave them abandoned, Peter assured his fellow believers that Jesus would not. He endures.

How could you expect to live in hope if the source of that hope is something that's not going to last? You can probably name a few things that you've experienced in life that seemed good at the start, only to see it fail or fade later on. If you're someone who's following Jesus in life, you're someone who's going to experience the suffering for his Name in some way or another. You'll be challenged on the choices that you make – and that's not simply saying that people aren't going to agree with you. By the working of the Holy Spirit, you'll be wrestling with your own desires and inclinations to chase the new. The enemy wants you to put your trust in passing things, wants you to base your hope on the shifting sand of the new, because that's a foundation that will disappear and leave you falling apart.

Those two disciples on the road to Emmaus that first Easter afternoon might have felt as if life had fallen apart. They'd pinned their hope on Jesus. They looked to him as the one that would bring the new experience of freedom in Israel. Then he died a criminal's death, and now his body had gone missing. The stranger who came to walk with them seemed to know nothing about this Jesus, so they explain it all to him. But then *he* explains it all to *them* – and finally, with the breaking of the bread, the disciples recognize the risen hope before them. Jesus endures.

In this season of Easter, we get to celebrate the living hope we have in Christ. This is a season filled with new life. In the verses that immediately precede our reading from 1 Peter today, the apostle writes, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:14-16) God calls us to new life that is lived in a holy way. United with Jesus through God's gift of Baptism, you are a saint – even as you struggle with sin and the challenge that it brings to the choices that you have to make in life. Living the holy life to which you've been called isn't about finding ways to be better than everyone else. The Church isn't a museum filled with perfect people, it's a hospital for sinners, people like you and me who

keep looking for hope in things that don't last. **Being holy doesn't come from continually running after the new; it comes from living in the Word that endures.**

Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum (The Word of the Lord Endures Forever) is the motto of the Lutheran Reformation, a confident expression of the enduring power and authority of God's Word. The motto is based on the apostle's citation of Isaiah 40:(6,8) that we heard today: "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." (1 Peter 1:24–25). It first appeared in the court of Frederick the Wise in 1522. He had it sewn onto the right sleeve of the court's official clothing, which was worn by prince and servant alike. It was used by Frederick's successors, his brother John the Steadfast, and his nephew John Frederick the Magnanimous. It became the official motto of the Smalcaldic League and was used on flags, banners, swords, and uniforms as a symbol of the unity of the Lutheran laity who struggled to defend their beliefs, communities, families, and lives against those who were intent on destroying them. The VDMA logo and statement has appeared throughout Lutheran churches worldwide and remains an enduring motto of the Reformation to this day.ⁱ

As people of the resurrection, we live in the living Word. It's the rock that's there as a foundation for your life. It's the source of our hope. In this 500th anniversary year of the Reformation, listen to what Martin Luther once wrote about the importance of God's enduring Word in Christian life:

One thing, and only one thing, is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ, as Christ says, John 11[:25], "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live"; and John 8[:36], "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed"; and Matt. 4[:4], "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Let us then consider it certain and firmly established that the soul can do without anything except the Word of God and that where the Word of God is missing there is no help at all for the soul. If it has the Word of God it is rich and lacks nothing since it is the Word of life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory, and of every incalculable blessing. This is why the prophet in the entire Psalm [119] and in many other places yearns and sighs for the Word of God and uses so many names to describe it.ⁱⁱ

It's the season of Easter – let's celebrate the hope that we have in Jesus, the living Word made flesh! May the Holy Spirit open our eyes as He did for those disciples in Emmaus; may we recognize our risen Savior in the breaking of the bread in a way that never gets old. Hear God's good news for you through Peter: you have been born again of the imperishable. In Jesus, you have the Word that will never be obsolete, that will never need to be replaced, that will never fade away. No matter how many times you see the new become old, no matter how many years go by, you have hope in Christ that will last.

Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum. VDMA. The Word of the Lord endures forever.

Amen.

ⁱ *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 2

ⁱⁱ Luther, M. (1999). [*Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*](#). (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 31, pp. 345–346). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.