

“THE PATRON SAINT OF LOST CAUSES”
I Peter 1:3-9 April 16, 2023

The Time Machine is a post-apocalyptic science fiction novel by H. G. Wells, published in 1895. The work is generally credited with the popularization of the concept and term of **time travel** by using a vehicle or device to travel purposely and selectively forward or backward through time.

The story is set in then-present Victorian England at a dinner party in the home of an English scientist whose name we are never told. He is simply referred to as the Time Traveler. This inventor tells his guests about the idea of a fourth dimension and a machine he has developed for traveling back and forth through time. After dinner, the scientist tests out his machine and eventually goes far into the future where he discovers two separate human species: the fair, childlike Eloi, and the savage, simian Morlocks. Underneath, the story is Wells’ commentary on society and in particular social classes.

One of the interesting aspects of the book is you have someone from the past who travels into the future, which then becomes his new present. In other words, the past, the present, and the future are all colliding together.

It would be a safe guess that the writer of the letter the church calls First Peter never thought about time travel nor inventing a machine to do so. Yet, he writes with all three tenses in the opening verses. “**3 ... By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (past event), 4 and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who are being protected by the power of God through faith (Present) for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (Future)”**

We hear the past, present, and future all woven seamlessly together. We are told **here is what God has done in the past**, **which results in what God is doing now**, and **how all this will impact a future glory**. The past, present, and future are all part of the divine tapestry, which we are a part of.

Well apart from the imagination of science fiction and future speculation, what is the point of bringing the past, the present, and the future together? What message is **First Peter** conveying to its readers, both then and now? The answer is found in verse 3: with the words “**living hope**”. Of course, you can only have living hope because dead hope is a misnomer. But language aside, the people reading this letter were going through some difficult times due to their discipleship and the world’s response to them. They needed a word of hope and encouragement during their struggle. Peter offers it through a vision of what God is doing.

I had an interesting conversation with a railroad worker and a school system employee recently. We were talking about our occupations and some of the dynamics of the job. The rail worker mentioned that he liked his job, but like any job, there are those days, those bad days. Days when a train derails, days when you are up 24 hours, days when people get hurt. And I agreed with him. I know those days of visiting the ICU, watching a parishioner take their last breath, someone getting a cancer diagnosis, a marriage breaking up, a child with an addiction. Those are bad days.

Then again, think about the people who are suffering in Ukraine, losing everything. That’s a bad year. Or think about people dealing with MS or Alzheimer’s or other debilitating diseases. That can make for a bad decade. But regardless of whether it is a day, a year, or a decade, the question is where do we find the **living hope and strength** to endure and move through it? That is the theme of First Peter.

I. THE POWER OF CHRIST

William Kamkwamba was born in poverty in Malawi in 1987. At the age of 13 he had to drop out of school because a famine thrust his subsistence-farming family into poverty. They could no longer afford to pay his school tuition.

Hungry to keep learning, William spent time in the local public library instead. After reading a book called *Using Energy*, he decided to create a makeshift wind turbine using blue gum trees and material he'd scavenged from a local scrapyards. There he found a tractor fan, a shock absorber and an old bicycle frame. He made the windmill's blades by melting pieces of PVC pipe. For a dynamo he used an old bicycle generator. His Rube Goldberg device worked. William was able to power a few small electrical appliances in his family's house.

That was only the beginning. Another wind turbine he built was able to pump water for irrigation. Local farmers became interested. Journalists, too, learned of his accomplishment, making William an international celebrity, a symbol of grit and inventiveness. In 2013, *TIME* magazine named him one of "30 People Under 30 Changing The World." He graduated the next year from Dartmouth College, his education having been supported entirely by scholarships. The award-winning 2019 film, "**The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind**," tells his story.

Like William there are a lot of clever people out there, many with a good heart who want to help others. Like William we can be industrious and work hard, but even with all our creativity we can't make the wind. That comes from a power greater than ourselves.

Who doesn't need a power greater than themselves? Who understands all things in the world? Who can navigate every circumstance, every issue, every need all on their own strength? Who doesn't like to be comforted when they hurt? Who doesn't need guidance and advice? Who doesn't need forgiveness for our harmful decisions, attitudes, and words? No one I know comes to my mind. We need God

always but, especially on those bad days. And the good news is the power of the resurrected Lord is there to comfort and blow the wind of the spirit to sustain us.

Peter writes, **“You...who are being protected by the power of God through faith.”** The word he uses for *protected* is a military term which means to be surrounded by a **garrison** of soldiers. This is the same idea behind the Old Testament phrases, “God is my rock, my solid ground, my fortress, my strong deliver.” Peter is telling us fear not, the power of God is at work in and around you. You are not alone. You are being sustained. Have faith in the one who loves you. The power of Christ is at work in us.

II. THE POWER OF A FUTURE

Recently, a refugee wrote to his godmother: **“I always look forward to receiving your letters; the warmth that radiates from them is a great comfort to me. Yes, I feel that spiritual values are the most important things in our earthly lives and that without them life itself is so full of sadness that it is scarcely worth living.”**

There is hope power that comes from having something to **look forward to**, even if it is something as simple as the words of a letter. Its amazing what we can endure when we are looking past the present trouble. Peter says the same thing.

“...and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” He tells the Ephesians I know things don’t look or feel good at the moment but what you’re going through is not the end. God is preparing a future for you that is so good that you’ll hardly remember the troubles of the day. We have an inheritance coming that can’t be touched. It can’t be ravaged by others, it can’t be polluted or devalued, it can’t be altered by life’s circumstances. Why, because our main inheritance isn’t just something, it someone; God’s very self. We are a people who are God’s possession and that can’t be stolen from us. Our future is secure in the Lord. We have hope because we have something to look forward to.

III. THE POWER OF TRIALS

Once, a sportswriter was invited for dinner at golf pro Arnold Palmer's residence. He arrived a bit early, and Mrs. Winnie Palmer met him, invited him in and said her husband would be down in a moment. The writer asked if, while he was waiting, he could see Palmer's trophy room. She replied, "**Oh, we don't have such a room.**"

That night, the writer asked the golf pro, who had more than 60 tour victories, why he didn't have all his trophies on display. Palmer looked the columnist right in the eye and replied, "**For what? That's yesterday's news!**"

Then Palmer explained: "I have enjoyed every victory and cherished the memories. I have celebrated those tournaments. But come Monday morning of the next week, I'm no different from the man who missed the cut last week. In fact, he's probably more hungry for a victory than I. So if I'm to be competitively ready, I must get my thoughts off yesterday and deal with today. There will be a day when I can take the time to look back. But as long as I want to stay competitive, I must never stop and marvel at what I have accomplished, only look forward to my next challenge at hand."

I think Palmer had the right mind set. Trials and challenges are part of life. With all his success he was not immune to bad days, especially when he lost his wife of 45 years to ovarian cancer.

Peter writes, **6 In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, 7 so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.**

To tell the truth, I don't like going through trials of life any more than anyone else, and yet we need those trials to refine us and our faith. God uses even our struggles to shape us, and strengthen us, and help us to become more Christ like.

Trails teach us compassion, humility, creativity, to laugh at ourselves, new coping skills, and how to trust in the Lord. We may not always change our circumstances, but we can change our character. We find hope in that God does some of his best work when we are struggling.

IV. THE POWER OF ENCOURAGEMENT

There's an old story about an artist who could observe, from his studio window, a panhandler plying his trade each day. He decided the man — whose shoulders drooped and whose eyes were downcast and sad — would make an interesting portrait study. So, he painted him from a distance. When he was finished, he took the portrait outside and showed it to the panhandler, to see what he thought of it.

“Who’s that?” the man asked. To him, the painting bore a slight resemblance to himself, but what he saw on the canvas was different. Here was a person of dignity, with upright posture and bright eyes. Why, the man in the painting was almost handsome.

“Is that really me?” he asked. **“I don’t look like *that*, do I?”**

But the artist replied, **“I paint what I see. This is the person I see in you.”**

As nice as it is to hear the words, “I love you” when it comes from people who don’t really know you or who don’t walk in your world, it can sound like empty sentiment. After all, it’s easy to love people who you don’t know, don’t see often, and have little meaningful interaction with. Perhaps a better practice would be to say, I believe in you, you’re got a real talent for..., you’re doing a good job, I really appreciate your compassion, timeliness, creativity, and other words of encouragement. We live in such a critical culture, one where everyone has an opinion about everything, and often not a very informed one. On top of that, we usually have no idea whether someone is having a bad day or what they are going through. Our words might just be the ones that help get them through it.

First Peter is a letter of encouragement because it believes the church is called to be a community of encouragement. It is the place where we share our burdens, pray for one another, find ways to build one another up, and give resources to help others along their way. Bad days will come, we can count on it. The church are the people who remind us that God is the same God of our past, our present, and our future. This is the God who holds us for ever in love and eternal hope. God sees us at our worst but also sees the person in us. Perhaps, we need to see a different way, and hear the call of encouragement.

In the 1999 publication *Prison and Jail Administration's Practices and Theory*, Reginald Wilkinson, director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, summarizes his positive view of prison visitation. He writes:

“The operation of a visitation program is an integral element of any prison system. Hundreds of thousands of relatives and friends visit inmates in prison each year. Experienced correctional managers know that visitation improves the prison environment. Visits give inmates something to look forward to, an incentive to participate in rehabilitative programs and a mechanism with which to cope with prison life.

“There are several reasons that visiting with family and friends is encouraged in the prison setting. The most important becomes evident after release. The prisoner who has maintained contact with supportive individuals such as family and friends has a ‘safety net’ when he or she returns to the community. Family and friends provide a feeling of belonging to a group. They often help released offenders seek and find employment and conduct themselves in a positive, constructive manner after release.”

If even the prison system knows the power of encouragement, how much more ought the church know it and practice it? **Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and**

rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, April 16, 2023

Second Scripture Lesson

I Peter 1:3-9

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

⁶In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, ⁷so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.