

1 Peter 1:22-2:3

Mainly focusing on what Peter says about cravings today so keep the passage open before you but before we delve into it, let's start with a little story.

John and I were in Turkey a week ago for a course on Mediterranean cooking and nutrition. It was only when we arrived there, we realised it was actual a "Low carb" course and most of the other people were either diabetic or pre-diabetic. It will still really good and we learned lots and found that after a week of no refined sugar we felt much better so we continued when we came home. Until Thursday that is, when I went to coffee at Clarie Hunt's house and ate a piece of cake made by Sophie Parry and a rock bun made by Claire. Both delicious but for the rest of the day the craving for sugar came back in force and I was hungry all day. Do you have things that you crave, maybe even feel slightly or strongly addicted to?

People crave all sorts of things don't they. We had to watch various advertisements on Channel 4 last week while watching a friend in Bake Off; food, alcohol, fast cars, jewellery, beauty, sex and all sorts of other weird stuff that we apparently can't live happily without.

Advertisers are trying to tap into the fact that cravings are deep, powerful, personal desires which move us to action and not always action we want to take. It is so hard to break away from them or to see people we love trying to do so.

Before we look at what Peter says about cravings, we need to notice the word "Therefore" at the beginning of chapter 2, verse 1. Whenever we see that word in the bible we need to look and see what it relates to.

Here if we look back at v.25 of chapter 1, we see he is talking about the "word that was preached to you" or as the NRSV version puts it the word that is the "good news that was preached to you".

As we know from earlier in chapter 1, this good news tells us about God's amazing rescue plan. That we have all been contaminated by sin and disobedience which have wrecked the relationship we were

designed to have with a holy and pure God. But out of his love for us he has paid the price for our sin with the precious blood of his son Jesus so that, through his death and resurrection, we can now be in a right relationship to God again. We don't even have to do anything to earn this, it is a free gift available to all who believe and trust in what he has done.

Here in v. 23 and earlier in v. 3, he uses an extraordinary metaphor for what happens when we receive this gift – he describes it as being like new birth. Not just a fresh start, but changed into new beings in whom God now lives by his Spirit.

2 Cor 5:17 says “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

Have you seen how much fresh new green grass is growing round here at the moment? It must be something to do with the fact that the this long droughty summer has starved it and now that it's getting proper water and nourishment again it's just gone wild and is growing as if spring has come early.

It reminds me of that time in the spring when cows that have been kept in a shed over the winter are let out into a field again and they race round the field, jumping and sometimes practically cartwheeling as they luxuriate in the freedom and fresh new grass again.

That's really what we should feel about being given new birth into God's family. We've come out of the long dark winter and constraints of sin and have been set free to know the freedom of living joyfully in God's presence, for eternity, not just for a season.

It's not surprising then that in chapter 2 v.2 Peter says we are like newborn babies. Some of us might be thinking “Not me, I am a very mature Christian and have been so for decades” but remember that Peter is writing this near the end of his life and many of the people he was writing to would have been Christians for 30 years or more.

We are new creations, we now have the privilege of being able to call God “Father”, we are brought into his family and now have a whole new learning curve on how to relate not just to God but to each other.

Look at v. 22 where Peter talks about having sincere love for each other. The word for love he uses is “philadelphia”, which means the sort of friendly love and warm affection that happens between friends. Hopefully we each feel that for each other as we look around the people in this building today.

But then Peter changes in the second half of that verse and introduces another Greek word for love – “agapeo” – this is a much stronger word describing sacrificial, selfless, unconditional love which seeks the wellbeing of others, regardless of their response. This is the love that God has shown each of us through Christ and if his spirit is living in our hearts, we should each be finding that agape love for others growing in us too.

I heard a story on a podcast last week of Archie and Sam Coates (he was vicar of the Brighton church which the Fuggles used to go to) They met a woman called Aleesh, who was on the streets, a drug addict, had spent more than half her life in prison. They welcomed her and cared for her and even had her living in their home with their young family for three years. She found her own Christian faith while doing an Alpha course with them and from then on, amazingly, the craving for drugs and cigarettes went. She found freedom through the love of God but also the deep love of his family.

I would find it really hard to have someone else living in our house with us. I love my space too much. What about you? Do we all need God to expand our hearts so that we are able to love more deeply and sacrificially?

With this foundation of being new creations who are being enabled to love deeply from our hearts, what does Peter now call us to do?

2, v.1: Therefore, “rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind.” How is it possible to have hearts full of all those traits and habits which are the opposite of deep love? True love wants the best for the loved one, each of these things Peter mentions here involve putting ourselves before others. They are all part of the old nature, what we were like deep inside before we received his gift of salvation and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to grow Christ-likeness in us.

We have a friend Paul who goes metal detecting on some of our fields, searching for treasure buried in the muddy ground. When he finds coins and other artefacts, he painstakingly cleans them up and then proudly brings them to us to see. God is a bit like a treasure hunter who comes out looking and when he finds us, he takes something that is dirty and mucky and he cleans it up and shines and polishes it until it is beautiful again.

Do we know that without God's salvation, we are dirty and mucky? Do we sometimes catch ourselves telling white lies, judging others but letting ourselves off the hook, saying things about other people that we wouldn't say to their face?

If we start picking up these unloving habits again, it is as if, having received the pure white clothes of our salvation from sin, we are trying to put on the dirty rags we clothed ourselves in before. Get rid of them, weed them out and burn them, don't tolerate them anymore.

Peter tells us what needs to go but he also then tells us what we need to fill ourselves with instead in v.2: "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

In order to grow up in our salvation – to have the family likeness formed in us by the holy spirit and to grow in righteousness and love, we need the right sort of nourishment.

Peter talks in v. 3 about us having tasted that the Lord is good, when we first realise what he has done for us in Christ. Then we go on to discover more about God and his kindness, goodness, patience, the sweetness of his presence when he draws close and we want more, that first taste leads to a growing appetite for more of him and his presence. Peter is saying here not just that we should crave more of God but also crave all that builds relationship with God – his word, his indwelling spirit, prayer, worship, his spiritual gifts as well as the spiritual disciplines such as fasting, giving, solitude.

The trouble is that so many other things cry out for our attention and give the impression that they will satisfy us. Instead, they tend to numb our desire for the real stuff (which would you rather eat, a sugary treat or a piece of broccoli or a lettuce leaf?)

Deep within each of us there is a strong need to be loved, accepted, valued, kept safe and that need is meant to be met by him. God has designed us to be nurtured in relationship with him. Adam and Eve were given everything they needed by God in his garden and instead they reached for the apple from the one tree that he asked them not to touch. Similarly, we too consciously or unconsciously grasp for other things to meet that need. We fall for the false promises of this world, the mirage's, illusions, temptations which promise to satisfy but can't actually do so.

What are those things which for us are like sirens calling us to put our trust in them and be cared for by them? Perhaps making or spending money, earning other people's approval, social media likes, sporting achievements or other worldly success. Maybe even doing good works or being needed or just staying healthy. Whatever they might be for each of us we need to recognise that we are trying to use them to satisfy a hunger that is meant to be for God himself and then transfer our craving from them to him.

The hardest thing is recognising what our cravings are in the first place. What is promising to give us security, value, significance? A good place to start is seeing what diverts us when we think of doing something which will nourish our relationship with God. The words that trap me every time are "I'll just". I think of spending some time reading my bible or praying but then I think "I'll just do this quickly first" and before I know it the whole day has gone and I have kept God at a distance while I keep ticking off jobs on my list. Something in me is craving that feeling of having accomplished enough, more than it is craving the presence of the living God, thinking that conquering my to do list is more important than whatever he might want to do with me today.

Hunger and thirst are good if we reach for the right things to satisfy them. We need to make sure we are pointing in the right direction and have our eyes fixed on the right thing.

I was walking in our wild flower meadow one lovely day in the summer and I noticed that there were thousands of Michaelmas daisies all facing exactly the same way, and that way was towards the sun. They seem to have learnt how to swivel around and find the sun's rays and then they

were basically receiving their nourishment from that. If you are a biologist, you would understand how that works.

Are we turning ourselves towards God or are we instead chasing after illusions that promise much but don't deliver? We need to fix our eyes on those things that will satisfy, that are spiritually nourishing, that will lead us deeper into God's presence and lead us to behold him, to dwell in his presence, to abide in him, to feast our eyes on him, to be fed and nourished by him.

In psalm 37 v.4 David says "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart".

I think that is God's invitation to each of us today. "Will you choose to delight yourself in me and see what I will pour out into your heart in return. Will you make space for me in your busy lives and allow me to meet your deepest needs?"

Where does Peter's message leave us today?

Has he convinced each of us to grab hold of God's offer of salvation and to enter fully into God's family like new born babies, to get rid of those things that belong to our old sinful life and to look to God to provide the nourishment we really need? Sometimes it can be hard to be sure of our salvation, to know if we are filled with the Holy Spirit, to let go of some of the old ways – it might be helpful to talk to someone you trust and ask them to pray with you if you think it might be a struggle.

On the front of your service sheet, you will see David's heart cry to God when he was in the desert, from Psalm 63.1.

"You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water."

Can we echo that cry today? Are we in touch with even a little bit of hunger and thirst for him?

Shall we pray together now and ask the Holy Spirit to come and increase that hunger and thirst in us and to help us to reach for his pure spiritual milk to satisfy that hunger.