

Third Sunday of Easter  
April 19, 2026  
1 Peter 1:17-23

This week, we should all play a game of lectionary linguistics.

The language in 1 Peter is clear as mud. Many preachers skip it for that reason. But like a muddy puddle, if you give it time, the mud settles — and clarity emerges. So go slow. Take your time. Let the mud settle.

The first linguistic hurdle we must leap over comes in the first five words: “If you invoke as Father...” (1 Peter 1:17).

I grew up hearing prayers in which “Father God” served as a spoken substitute for written punctuation: “Help us, Father God, to know you more fully, Father God, as our Father, Father God.” The people behind such prayers obviously have no issue following 1 Peter 1:17 and invoking God as Father, but I know others who do.

I have no problem addressing God as Father. But I also have no problem addressing God as Mother. God hears us either way! As our church confesses in A Statement of Faith, “Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child, like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home, God is faithful still.”

Also, many of us have now studied the Mary Daly quote from the seminal feminist work *Beyond God the Father*: “If God is man, then man is God.” So, many of us understand that using exclusively masculine language for God is a bad idea — not because it fails to address God properly, but because it fails to address the issues of sexism and androcentrism in our world.

This is why you should play lectionary linguistics with me this week. We have people in our congregation who get tripped up in the first five words of this passage.

In 1 Peter, calling God “Father” is not meant to divide us, but to unite us. If God is a parent to us, then we are all siblings in Christ. Likewise, the word “love” (v. 22) used later in this passage comes from the Greek word *philadelphia*, which literally calls us to love all our siblings within this family. Remind your congregations of this bond. Remind them of our familial connection. Remind them of God’s immense love for us, which allows us to “love one another deeply from the heart” (v. 22).

The next hurdle might be the word “fear” (v. 17). Are we supposed to be afraid of God? Is that why we go to church, to stay on God’s good side? Funny enough, that also was the underlying message of many of those prayers I was raised with: “Father God, keep us out of the fiery furnace.” I imagine many of us have come to think of this in a very different way now, but I bet there are still people in your congregation stumbling over it.

Some friends and neighbors of mine recently got back from a trip to the Grand Canyon. They described their immediate reaction to seeing it for the first time as “fear,” but not in the sense of running away. They felt small. They said they were careful where they stepped. They were overwhelmed by its beauty and scale. This is more what I think of when I think of biblical fear now. It’s a mix of wonder and humility and respect. When God comes near — don’t run away, be in awe!

It’s easy for people in our congregations to trip over semantics like these when a single English word tries to carry more lexical weight than it was ever meant to hold. So, help your people push through the linguistics this week and into this good news!

You could hone in on the word “exile” (v. 17) and talk about how this language calls us to offer a new home and a sense of belonging for those socially marginalized. You could talk about the concept of “enduring” (v. 23) from the Stoic standpoint of becoming unbreakable over and against the Christian worldview of being held, as Ryan Holiday describes in *The Obstacle is the Way*. If you have a baptism happening this Sunday, you could definitely spend time in the tension

of what it means to be “born anew” (v. 23) in the midst of the same old (See: Marcus J. Borg’s *The Heart of Christianity*).

I’ll leave you with one more thought that focuses on another tricky word found in verse 22: “obedience.” Fred Craddock wrote in *First and Second Peter and Jude*: “In Scripture, listening, truly listening, is already obedience, in the Bible’s conviction that to hear the word of God is to be affected by it, to be changed by it.” This week, help your people push past some of the linguistic limitations they might be bringing to this passage and help them dive deeper to truly hear God’s word to all of us.

Like I said before: go slow, take your time, and let clarity emerge — but do it as a family, held in love, being transformed!

## Questions for reflection on 1 Peter 1:17-23

1. How did 1 Peter 1:17-23 intrigue, disturb, challenge, comfort, encourage or inspire you?
2. What lectionary linguistics stick out to you this week?
3. What might it mean for someone to hear God’s Word in a way that actually changes them?
4. For those of you who attend funerals down the street closer to Gratiot, you hear the word catechetics, we say Christian education, you also heard them refer to RCIA now OCIA, we call the same convert classes. They call one prayer the Our Father, we call it The Lord’s Prayer. Every denomination has their own language.