

1 Peter 1 and 2 - Resident aliens- Daniel 6:1-5

1 Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, exiles, scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ...

1 Peter 1:17 Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

1 Peter 2:11 I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires ...

When Christianity started, it was a small group. By the end of the first century, there were probably fewer than 100,000 believers. The cross was not yet a popular object, not a beautiful piece of jewellery, because crucifixion is such a humiliating death; in Roman times Christians could not use the cross as a positive symbol.

So Peter in his letter is addressing small groups of believers, scattered over a large area. This is encouraging for us: a small church is nothing new!

Peter addresses these Christians as resident aliens in a foreign territory. 2:11 is the key verse in this letter.

His readers were struggling to know how to live as

God's people in a hostile world, like the exiled Jews in Babylon. And our situation is very similar: we are a 'colony of heaven'.

Peter never imagined that he would be worshipped as a saint and that a large cathedral full of gold and jewels would be called 'St Peter's Church'.

Anabaptists (Mennonites) and Baptists understand this situation to mean the following:

- As Christians we are called to be exiles, to live as aliens, to persevere in hard situations until glory we enter God's glory. We will often experience hostility in our environment, like the exiled Jews (Daniel), because the world does not accept us. We are a community of the cross.
- We should not withdraw from society but try to be a factor for positive change. We are here with a missionary purpose! Peter sees potential for changes in society coming from the faithful witness of the Church, and in our time the situation is similar.
- As the church we do not create a separate society, but we affect the society of which we are a part. We have a task!
- The church does not seek power or fame, but it serves society humbly.
- The church is never a national church, where church and state cooperate. The church is rather something unique, a worldwide network. The church does not bless the weapons of the state but it strives for peace.

1 Peter is a letter about our Christian responsibility in society. Like Daniel and Joseph did, we can make a positive contribution in an alien environment, but we will never fully belong.

Christians are never too welcome or secure! So us being in a minority is not strange. Being small and vulnerable is the natural condition of the church.