

March 30, 2008
Easter 2

"Our Living Hope"

1 PETER 1:3-9

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Electronics are sure changing. We used to store information from our computers on small floppy drives that could hold about 300 words of text on 2 reams of paper. Today we have 4 gigabyte jump drives and tiny little SD cards that can hold the equivalent of 400,000 pages of text on 800 reams of paper. Think of how many changes we have seen in the last 20 years. We went from listening to music on cassette tapes, to CD's, and now to MP3 players. Televisions come in High Definition flat panels. Video games have sure changed since the first Pac Man. And we are optimistic that the changes we have seen in the last 20 years will continue into the future.

Are we just as hopeful about our economy, the price of gasoline, or bringing our soldiers home from the wars in the Mid East? What about selling your home and getting a good price for it? How about the retirement account that flat lines because of falling stock values and lower interest rates?

Electronics, home values, jobs, the price of gasoline, and entertainment is all insignificant compared to the greatest blessing that can ever come into your life, the blessing of being loved by people and even more important to be loved by God. We can lose the love of people if they move away from us. They may stop loving us or even die. The love that Jesus has for us was guaranteed to last forever by his resurrection. It provides us with what Peter calls a living hope. This morning I want to talk to you more about this living hope and how it changes your life, and how optimistic we can be about it.

A living hope gives you an inheritance that does not fade

First, Peter tells us that we have a living hope through our new birth that connects us to Jesus resurrection from the dead and also connects us to a future inheritance that never perishes, spoils or fades. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade."

It is amazing how we get linked or connected or tied into Jesus resurrection from the dead. This does not happen by something we do or because we have reached a certain level of goodness in our lives. It happens by God's mercy when he gives us new birth by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Later in this chapter Peter tells us that we were born again by the living and enduring Word of God. Here he tells us that we were born again by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Someone might say there is a mistake in the Bible. But then we can also show them from the Bible that we are born again by the water and the Word in Holy Baptism as Jesus said to Nicodemus.

In our first lesson for today we heard how Peter preached to people on Pentecost about Jesus' resurrection from the dead. He told them how Jesus died and how the Father raised him from the dead and how this was all predicted in the Old Testament prophets. The message of the resurrection had such power that over 3000 people came to faith and were baptized. When Jesus showed Thomas his hands and side, Thomas responded by saying to Jesus, "My Lord and my God." Then Jesus told Thomas how blessed people are when they do not see and yet believe. "Because you have seen me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Your faith connects you to Christ, your precious faith that God gave you because of his mercy. The Word of God creates this faith and so does our baptism. That is why Romans 6 says, "We are buried with Christ by baptism" into his death and into his resurrection.

Because you have been linked to Christ's resurrection, you are also linked to "An inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, that is kept in heaven for you." Ours is a living hope, because it always stays alive, is always there for us, and will never fade away, or diminish or lose its value. It is secured for us by Jesus and kept safe until we finally are taken home to be with him. Jesus told us that he is going to prepare a place for us. That place never fades or loses its value. 2 Corinthians 4 tells us, "So we fix our eyes on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." Remember how you parked your car when it was new at the very end of the parking lot so it would not be dinged by other cars or shopping carts. Now that it has multiple dings, you really don't care that much if there is another one. The flowers fade, including the Easter lilies you took home with you last week are fading. Our homes on this earth change as we move into different phases of life, but our eternal home remains the same.

Our living hope sustains us in the trials of this life

Having this living hope really sustains and helps us during the trials that life brings to us. We get the impression from what Peter wrote that the Christians reading this were experiencing a wave of persecution that was sweeping through the Roman Empire. He writes, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trial." The Roman historian Tacitus wrote of the persecution under Nero, "A huge multitude of Christians perished in the most sadistic ways. Nero rolled the Christians in pitch, and then set light to them, while they were still alive and used them as living torches of flame to light his gardens. He sewed them up in the skins of wild animals, and then set his hunting dogs upon them..." Jesus said of his faithful disciples, "Take up your cross and follow me."

Then there are the daily trials of life that come to all people. It was Job who said that man is destined to trouble as the sparks that fly upward." Just as you cannot have a fire without

some sparks flying upward, you cannot have life on this earth without experiencing pain, suffering and sorrow. Peter writes that our living hope is so real we can rejoice in it every day even when we have trials and tribulations. What a blessing it is to have a living hope that we can focus on each day, a hope that fills us with joy so great that we can confidently say with Paul, "The sufferings of this present life are not worth comparing to the glory that will be ours."

The sufferings of this life have a way of refining our faith and make it shine just as fire refines gold and makes it shine brightly. "These have come so that your faith- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Christ is revealed." How much is gold worth these days, over \$1000 an ounce? I heard this past week that Elko, Nevada has become a boomtown because they are reopening some of the old gold mines. People are taking their gold jewelry and cashing it in. Fire refines gold. See the rough gold nugget with its impurities, suddenly become bright as it is refined in the fire. So it is with you faith dear Christian. The sufferings of this present life lead you to trust more confidently in the place that Jesus has prepared for you.

Have you ever heard of the catacombs in Rome? These underground caverns hold both the bodies of the heathen and the Christians. They were carved into the limestone and extend for hundreds of miles and hold hundreds of thousands of bodies. Most of the bodies laid to rest were Christians but some are pagan Romans. Christians buried their dead with the hope of the resurrection. They placed palm branches in their hands and carved words into the stone, and plastered the walls with frescos of scenes from the Bible, especially of Jesus the Good Shepherd carrying the lost sheep. Over 15,000 epitaphs have been recorded and they have themes such as "Death is but a short sleep; the soul is with Christ and lives in God, the body waits for a joyful resurrection." In contrast to Christian hope are epitaphs of the heathen that express no hope and only say such things as "he lived a good life."

A Christian nurse made the comment that she can often spot the people who are Christians by the way they face their illness and handle death. This past week I saw someone I know going up the hospital carrying a Bible with him. He is an elder in one of the churches here in town and he was on his way to read to a woman who only had a few days left to live. Faith shines like gold under such times of pain, suffering, and persecution, nurtured and sustained by the Word of God and the hope of the resurrection.

Our living hope nurtures our love for Jesus

This living hope that we have creates in us a longing to see Jesus again face to face in all his glory. "Though you have not seen him, you love him; even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of our faith, the salvation of your souls." There is a goal, an end point, a final chapter in our lives, that we cannot wait to see fulfilled. It is that moment in history when Jesus comes in glory and we will see him face to face, just as Thomas did when he saw the nail marks in the hands of Jesus and knew it was the Lord. We have what Peter calls an "expressible and glorious joy" as we contemplate that shining moment when we see Jesus in all of his glory.

In 1 John 3:2 we are told, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we shall see him as he is." The church fathers affectionately called this "the beatific vision." This is the hope of seeing Jesus face to face again, just as he is. I read a story once about the son of a famous English admiral who became blind. Even though he was blind he was able to meet a beautiful girl. They fell in love and planned to get married. People said, "Too bad he is blind, and cannot see how beautiful she is." Then his father heard about a special surgery that could correct blindness. The young man had the surgery shortly before his wedding day and he could see again. He requested that his future bride not see him until she walked down the aisle on their wedding day. When the music started playing, and he saw his bride for the first time, with the new sight that had been given to him, tears came into his eyes, tears of joy. She was more beautiful than anything he had ever imagined. We cannot begin to imagine the joy that will be ours when Jesus comes and we see him as he is, face to face.

One of the most successful television commercials of all time was the Duracell battery commercial with the "Energizer Bunny" that just keeps going and going and going. People want things to last and not fade away and disappoint us. The hope we have in Jesus and his resurrection is a living hope that goes on forever and ever and ever. Amen.