

The Second Sunday of Easter

April 19, 2020

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

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. This inheritance is 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 all 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 the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—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 end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

“Joyful Faith”

Life with God, lives of faith with God need power. Eternal salvation is secured by the cross and the empty tomb. Just like that. You didn't need to do anything. Jesus accomplished it. When Jesus came out of the tomb on Easter, hope came with him. New life came with him. Not an end to all our problems. But victory through Jesus that gives a new way of living. Think of it more like fuel. Most of the time we don't think of all the work that goes into powering our vehicles or heating our homes. But it's a process. Energy needs to be extracted, refined, and delivered. Then it can give us power. It's the same way with faith. Joy comes to the hearts of God's people through the resurrection of Jesus. Faith taps into the unsearchable and inexhaustible power of Jesus. And faith goes through refining. Power needs to be delivered. Joy is alive in faith.

I. Joy in the Riches of Living Hope (v. 3-5)

Mayors, governors and the president can all make bold proclamations. They can offer earnest appeals to get things back to normal. But it will take more than words to bring immediate improvements to our lives. Peter has something that makes an immediate impact on our lives. Peter expresses a glow given off by the life of a Christian. He erupts: **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”** (1 Peter 1:3) Now for those of you coming down from the euphoria of Easter, it might be a bit of a stretch to share Peter's enthusiasm. Your Easter joy tends to long about as the sugar high from Easter candy. Once the special day is gone and the special times with special people are over, so are the feelings.

Peter shares this encouragement with you today and grounds it in something very real. Your heavenly Father caused you to be born again when he brought you to faith. He gives you birth **“into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”** (1 Peter 1:3) A remarkable transformation has occurred in your life. And God is

responsible for it. God's mercy caused this change and it taps into a living hope. Every religion preaches hope. Follow these steps and you will reach enlightenment. Follow these rules and you will get closer to God. Only the mercy of God is dependent on something else. It taps into the living Christ. Your living hope is only possible through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Peter, of course, isn't just giving believers an empty pep talk. He is writing to an original audience who are experiencing some very real challenges to their faith. We don't know the exact details of what they were going through, but the people who read these words the first time were in danger of abandoning the faith because of the hardships they were going through. Since Peter couldn't just hop on a plane or give them encouragement via web chat, he put quill to parchment and offered them a letter to encourage them not to give up hope.

So in the middle of their struggles, Peter wants to point believers ahead to something they already have, but won't get to fully enjoy until they pass through some of these hardships. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, each believer has an inheritance stored up in heaven personally for you. Here we worry that an inheritance will be eaten up by taxes. Your eternal inheritance can never be destroyed or corrupted. Earthly treasures can be lost because we misuse them and neglect them, but your heavenly treasure will never be stained or defiled. Some things lose their value and beauty over time, but your heavenly treasure won't grow dim or lose its beauty. In fact, God is standing guard over you.

You have probably heard about what it's like when oil or gas is discovered at a new location. People sitting atop that deposit feel like they have been given a gift. They didn't do anything other than be in the right spot where a natural resource was trapped underneath them at the right time when technology allowed that resources to be unlocked. Do you notice who is the one working to give you your living hope? God did the work of bringing you to faith. God connects with you through faith to make your future glory a reality. God actively keeps and guards you in the faith.

II. Joy in Comfort of Living Hope (v. 6-7)

Joy can be very difficult to prolong. It's true in any circumstance. But it's definitely more difficult when the situations get more extreme.

History tells us that Peter paid the ultimate price for his hope in Christ. He likely met his demise, if the early Christian traditions are correct, under the maniacal rule of Emperor Nero. Peter might not be talking about the precursors to this organized and empire-wide persecution. It could be something much smaller and simpler and more subtle. But the key is, no matter what form it takes, Peter helps us see it is just temporary. And God can do some amazing things even in the worst hardships experienced by believers.

Peter wants you to think of whatever it is you are going through - whether it is the pressure you feel from society that is making it tougher to be a person with deep convictions or a school environment where the only unacceptable lifestyle is one that holds onto absolute truth or it is the heartache you feel in your own family because you can't even bring up the

topic of religion without a fight breaking out - whatever you are going through is a refining. Refining recognizes there are impurities to be removed before a better and more beneficial product can come out. Crud might be a more accurate term. There is crud hanging onto your faith. It's mixed in. It is tainting your heart. It is contaminating your relationship with your Lord. It might be logic. It might be doubt. It might be skepticism. Faith crud is anything that prevents pure trust in God's promises. Faith crud is any additive you insert from your heart or your mind or your feelings that interferes with confidence in what God is doing.

That extraction process can be relatively minor or it can be intensely painful. I'm sure you know someone like this. When a believing spouse dies, the Christian survivor can be crushed by grief and nearly overwhelmed by sorrow. Everything inside that widower tells him to get angry at God, blame God, turn his back on God. But it is precisely in those times when he feels like he has absolutely nothing else that he grows in his reliance on God. He deepens his dependence on God's promises. He has nothing left but to cast himself on God's mercy and trust in God's promise of a glorious resurrection for all believers, a joyous reunion with all people of faith. That sorrowing widower has passed through a fire. He has become refined by trials. And then he is allowed to testify to the way God's love and support brought him through that suffering, how God's love and support from fellow Christians carried him in moments of doubt and weakness. Even if the tears don't go away overnight, he has glory and praise in his heart as he waits for Jesus to come back and fulfill his promises.

Peter helps us confront our faulty concepts about faith. So often we feel like faith is a weapon God uses to do amazing things. But faith is simply trust in the God who has unlimited power. Lutheran Christians emphasize discipleship as life under the cross. It's not an escape from the cross and troubles. It's not running away from difficulties. Luther says it this way: "God lays the cross upon all Christians in order to purify and cleanse them well that their faith may cling to the Word alone and trust in nothing else."

III. Joy Gives Purpose to Faith (v 8-9)

So what does faith look like? Joyful. Joy doesn't always look like success in everything you put your mind to or problem free living. But joy means you know what you have through faith in Jesus. It's hope even when there is no hand sanitizer. It's prayer even when there is no vaccine. It's knowing Jesus is the source of deep healing. His victory is a remedy against despair. It's support from Scripture even when everything seems to be going the wrong direction. It's having the ultimate questions answered by our all-knowing, all-powerful God. Faith is the very essence of new life because it is centered on the relationship with God through Jesus Christ established by the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith shows itself in joy because that relationship with God give ultimate meaning and purpose to every day of life.

Peter reminds us today that we believe even if we haven't seen. We love even if we haven't found the proof we're after. Love isn't something we have for our favorite restaurant or even our favorite team. This love is the sacrificial love Jesus has for us. Our love for Jesus is based on the unimaginable love he showed when he descended to earth, enduring the suffering and shame at the hands of Roman soldiers, and clung to the cross until the last remnant of

our debt was paid. Faith expresses itself joy and action. It allows you to come even closer to the goal of your faith. Day by day your faith is built up as you come to worship, join in Bible study, open the Scriptures, spend moments in private devotion and prayer. Little by little God is causing growth and maturity to take place in your heart as you get closer to the eternal blessings Jesus has in store for us when he returns.

So you can do something absurd. You can praise God just like Peter does: **“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.”** (1 Peter 1:3) Praise has some pretty powerful side effects. Praise is a great remedy for hearts weighed down by discouragement. Praise God for who He is and what He has done for you. Praise God and reflect on what kind of God He is and the amazing qualities He has. Praise God for all the blessings he pours out into your life when he opened the tomb of Jesus to show you victorious living.

If only I could flip a switch and get everything back to normal. Don't you sometimes wish this was all just a bad dream? We could just wake up and it would all just fade away? If only faith came in pill form. Take the right dose at the right time and God makes it all better. No more worry. No more doubt. No more temptations that throw me off track from God.

Faith is not a magic pill to make everything bad go away. Faith is fuel in the tank of your heart. Day by day, year by year faith allows you to understand what you have already. You have “new birth” into “an inheritance” that is incorruptible. This is yours through Jesus Christ. This gift is guarded and kept for you by God himself. This is your reason for rejoicing. This is what you get to do as you grow to discover the blessings of Jesus' resurrection more and more. The victory of Jesus is yours. Faith grows to appreciate more and more what it means for you. Faith takes them to heart. Faith changes your heart and makes those gifts real in your life. Faith endures suffering and trials. Faith expresses itself in love and joy. Faith is rooted in the resurrected Christ. Tap into that source of joy and hold onto the joyful ride. Amen.