



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Only Hope

1st Peter 1: 3-9

It is the week after Easter Sunday. I am not sure what that means for you. It may mean a time to relax, it may mean peeps are half price at Winn Dixie, I hope that it, allows us a moment to reflect on Holy Week and Easter Sunday, and how God breaking the life death cycle with resurrection may impact our life. That is a good question isn't it. How does Jesus' resurrection impact my life. What does Jesus' resurrection mean for my life? Let that sit with you for a minute.

Easter Sunday is a day full of hope. And we are going to talk about hope today. But "Hope" is such an interesting word. Often the hope we hold onto on Easter Sunday is the hope that things just don't get too crazy on the day. We hope the kids are not too out of control after all the sugar the Easter Bunny brought, we hope all our family are able to get there and then behave with each other when they do. We hope that the big meal we have prepared turns out well. We hope we have a good day.

When you work in the church, you know it is a big day, there will be a lot of people here. There will be family members, there will be friends that we haven't seen in a long time. In person and online. We really hope that we don't mess it up. We want the Easter experience to be moving and memorable and there are a lot of moving parts. We hope it all goes well. Of course, most of that is in God's hands but we still hope it goes well. Sometimes those concerns make it difficult to stop and rest with the message of Easter and the hope that we find in resurrection. I hope we can do that a little today. One of the mistakes we often make on the week after Easter is to think that Easter is over. It is done, but of course it is not. In the church we celebrate Easter time until Pentecost on May 24th. So perhaps

now that things are a little quieter, we can take a few moments to think about the hope we find in the resurrection of Jesus.

We hope for a lot of things, most of them like those things I mentioned concerning Easter, can be quite speculative. A couple of weeks ago U2 released some new music, and I remember thinking before I played it, Oh I hope it's good, I talk these guys up all the time. I hope that the check engine light doesn't mean something bad. In a dry season, I may hope it rains, we all hope those we know who are sick, get well, we hope our sports teams win, our favorite show comes to town, we hope we can get tickets. Hope is all around us and it is usually speculative by nature. But before we get into our passage, I want to share that the hope we find in this text is not speculative. The Greek word for hope, Elpece, has much more certainty attached to it. It translates to expectant, trust, confidence. So, when you hear the word hope, it is not a speculative hope where we may not have a lot of confidence, for example, I hope Scotland can beat Brazil in the World Cup. It is much more like, I trust, I know that Scotland will beat Brazil in the World Cup. That is the hope our passage speaks of.

Our lectionary Gospel passage from John 20 which Mitchell read for us focuses on Jesus' encounter with the disciple Thomas. Quite often on the Sunday after Easter we focus on the unbelief of Thomas and Jesus statement *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* There is a really cool contrast in another of our lectionary texts found in the first letter of Peter where the author offers encouragement to persecuted Christians and states that *"Although you have not seen^[b] him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy."* These are the ones that Jesus said will be blessed in the Gospel reading. So this morning we will spend a few minutes going through this passage from 1st Peter.

Earlier in the passage we find the reason for their belief even though they have not seen Jesus. We read, *“By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,⁵ who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

A living hope. What a wonderful phrase. Why living? Because it is resurrection hope.

The letters of Peter are usually called General Epistles, which usually means they are written for all the church, but in the first few verses, we see that the author has a specific audience in mind. That audience are Christians exiled to different parts of the known world, who are both persecuted yet still faithful to Jesus. I am not sure what exact persecution they faced, that is not shared, and I am not sure if we can claim to have experienced that same persecution, but we may know about feeling exiled, feeling marginalized, being on the outside. Perhaps we have faced some kind of persecution for claiming Jesus. These letters are pastoral in nature and meant to encourage. I hope we can connect with that encouragement that was written for our fellow believers 2000 years ago.

So what can we know of this hope?

Peter begins with praise. Before he addresses their struggles, he directs their attention to God. That matters. Because true hope does not begin with our circumstances, it begins with God’s character.

Notice the language: *“In his great mercy he has given us...”*

Hope is not something we manufacture. It is something we receive.

This is not how we often think. We tend to believe hope comes when we get our lives together, when we fix our problems, when we finally become strong enough. But 1st Peter says the opposite: hope begins with God’s mercy, not our performance.

And this hope is tied to *new birth*. That means it is not just a change in outlook, it is a change in identity. We are not just people trying harder; through resurrection, we are people made new.

And because this living hope is rooted in the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is not a figure of the past; He is alive in the present. Our hope is not built on an idea, but on a risen Savior.

A dead hope cannot sustain you. But a living hope can.

When you feel like hope is slipping through your fingers, remember—you are not responsible for creating it. God has already given it to you through Jesus. Your role is not to produce hope, but to receive and rest in it.

Peter now lifts our eyes forward. He speaks of an inheritance, a future that is guaranteed for those who belong to Christ.

He describes it in three ways:

Imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Everything we know in this world is subject to decay. Relationships can fracture. Health can deteriorate. Possessions can be lost. Even our best moments fade with time. But not this inheritance. This is a hope that is untouched by time, untouched by sin, untouched by decay. It is not vulnerable like everything else we hold onto. And then Peter says something even more powerful: not only is the inheritance being kept for you, *you are being kept for it*.

“You who are being protected by the power of God.”

That means your hope does not ultimately depend on your ability to hold onto God—it depends on God’s ability to hold onto you. And God does not let go. When life feels unstable, remind yourself: your hope is not at risk. Your future is not hanging by a thread. It is in God’s hands.

And this hope endures through our suffering. 1st Peter does not pretend that hope eliminates suffering. In fact, he assumes suffering is part of the Christian life. In verse 6 we read, as the persecution of his audience is addressed,

“In this you rejoice,^[a] even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials”

This hope is not theoretical. It is real, and it is ours even in times of suffering.

I love that line: *“for a little while.”*

That does not mean suffering feels short. When you are in it, it can feel endless. But it will not have the final word. And more than that, Peter says suffering has purpose.

Verse 7. “so that the genuineness of your faith, being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

He compares faith to gold refined by fire. Fire is not pleasant, but it is purposeful. It removes impurities and reveals what is real. In the same way, trials may test and strengthen our faith. They deepen our dependence on God.

That does not mean God causes all suffering, but it does mean God can use it. God can refine, strengthen, and deepen us through it. I think most of us may look back at times of suffering as times when we felt God’s closeness and peace in deep ways.

If you are in a season of trial, it does not mean hope is gone. It may mean hope is being strengthened in you.

After the author speaks of their faith without seeing Jesus in person, we read,

“...for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Notice the Greek present tense: *you are receiving*. Salvation is not just something waiting in the future, it is something unfolding right now.

God is at work in you: Changing your heart, renewing your mind, shaping your character. You are not who you once were. And you are not yet who you will be. But you are in the process of being transformed. Hope lives in that tension. And in that space, hope keeps us moving forward.

I asked the question earlier, what does Jesus’ resurrection mean for my life?

It means that hope is not fragile, it is alive. It means your story is not defined by your past, but by God's mercy. It means your future is not uncertain, but secure in God's hands. It means your suffering is not meaningless, but purposeful. It means your faith, even when tested, is precious and enduring. And it means that even without seeing everything clearly, you can trust the living hope within and live with joy.

We live in a world that offers many versions of hope, but most of them are temporary.

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1st Peter points us to something better.

A hope that breathes. A hope that endures. A hope that lives because Jesus lives.

So, whatever you are carrying today, whatever burden, whatever question, whatever struggle, hear and believe this truth from 1st Peter: *You have been given new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

That living hope is alive in you. That living hope is the good news of the Gospel. Jesus is Alive. He has risen, he has risen indeed. Happy Eastertime. Amen.