



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

March 30, 2008  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter  
1 Peter 1:3-9  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Acts 2:14a, 22-32  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 16  
Gospel: John 20:19-31

### Rejoice in Our Living Hope

I make no secret of it and I'll tell anyone that will listen to me in the weeks leading up to it, last week is far and away my favorite week of the year. I love all the services of Holy Week, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter. I especially love the contrast in worship between Good Friday and Easter morning. On Good Friday when we come to church, the church is stark. It's bare. It's black. There's nothing on the altar. There are no candles. There is no cross. There is no lamb. There is even a black shroud that is covering Christ as we mourn his death and remember how our sins killed him. Then when you walk in Easter morning, even before you get up the back steps, you know that something is different. You can smell it. You can smell the lilies. The sense of smell tells you that something is different. When you get inside, there are lilies everywhere. It's white. It's glorious. Then, as you soak that in with your eyes, then your ears tell you there is something different. The band plays—the brass, the timpani accompanies the liturgy, the festival setting, the hymns, the pre-service—all along it tells us something incredible has happened, and that is what we celebrate. Christ has risen! He has risen indeed! We remind ourselves over and over again. You go from the starkness of Good Friday to the joy of Easter morning and it's just an incredible thing!

Now as we gather together this morning, the instruments are in their cases, the lilies have thinned out a little bit, but we are reminded by the Holy Spirit through the Words of Peter that our hope hasn't changed, our joy hasn't changed, and he urges us, from the Words I just read to you, to continue to live in that hope and to rejoice in the living hope that God has given us. He points us back to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. But not only that, he points us to what goes on in our lives and tells us about the difference that the resurrection of Jesus makes for our daily lives. It's there and it's why we want to and why we do rejoice in our living hope.

Have any of you ever seen either of the National Treasure movies? If you saw one of those movies, there are all kinds of clues for them to track down this treasure that has been lost for a time. There are these clues that to me seem incomprehensible, but these guys solve each clue and it takes them to another clue and then they solve that clue. That takes them to another clue and then another clue and then finally they have to dig through some decayed bones in a tomb to get to where all the treasure is after a few more dead ends. Then when the powder is lit and the light goes coursing through the treasure room, it's an incredible sight as the flames flicker off of the gold that is

everywhere. They are kind of neat movies. But watching them, I thought to myself that I would still be back on the first clue not having any idea what it meant.

We have a glorious treasure, as Peter tells us, that will never perish, spoil or fade, unlike gold which perishes even though refined by the fire, right? But this treasure isn't one where we have to chase clues around. This isn't one we have to go on a treasure hunt to find. This is a treasure that comes to us through Jesus' resurrection from the dead. God touches our hearts with his gospel through the Word and through Baptism and through the Lord's Supper and assures us that yes, we are sinners who don't deserve any of it, but God has given us this incredible treasure. In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection. We don't have to chase it. It's there in front of us. It's presented to us in ways that even our Sunday school children can sing and tell us about, right? This isn't some great hidden thing. The most important treasure, the most important truth you can ever learn is that you are a sinner who deserves nothing from God, but God in his great mercy lived in your place, died in your place, and through his Spirit he leads you to believe that truth. You are forgiven. You have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. That's our living hope. It's there day after day after day. And Peter urges us to live in that joy—to live in it and keep our eyes focused on it.

But you and I get sidetracked, don't we? Don't we get sidetracked by the things of this world? Maybe by the gold that does perish, spoil and fade? Maybe we get sidetracked by chasing money so that we don't have time for this glorious inheritance and hearing about it again and again? Maybe you and I get sidetracked by the things of this world that will pass away—the relationships that we have? Maybe we begin to put more emphasis on them and God fades into the background so that we don't have time for him? Maybe our spouse doesn't have time for him and we don't want it to become a source of a problem. So, God gets pushed more into the background. Or maybe we just live our lives and we take our eyes off of Christ and what he has done for us and then we are confronted by a lot of things that cause us to worry, that cause us to become anxious, that cause us to do the exact opposite of what Peter urges us to do, which is to rejoice. We face a lot of things that sometimes terrify us. And if those things take our eyes off of the inheritance that we have, we are going to be in trouble because we will forget about the love God has shown to us. Satan is going to be right there telling us, "See, this is evidence that God doesn't love you."

So Peter answers that question of Satan about grief and suffering and trials as he points us to the resurrection. He tells us that it brings us incredible comfort in the middle of our trials. He tells us to think about our faith. He talks about rejoicing in this glorious inheritance we have. He says "though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief and all kinds of trials." He tells us why they come. "These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may" itself be refined and may have all of its impurities burned away as you face these difficulties in these things that terrify you when you look to the Lord and you find in him your strength and you find in him the ability to handle what you can't handle on your own. Then your faith has proved genuine and results in praise, glory and honor to God.

God never tells us that these trials that we suffer will be easy. He never tells us that we are going to have a life that is only filled with joy and never filled with disappointment. But he does tell us where to go to find a source of joy even in the midst of grief and sorrow. That is to the glorious inheritance that we have.

The things that we suffer in this world—the fears, the uncertainties, the losses, the loss of loved ones, the uncertainty as loved ones face sickness, disease and even death—all these things Peter tells us are there so that we learn to look more to God. So the impurities that are in our faith are burned away as we dig deeper into his Word and hear his promises over and over. Every promise that he makes that he will be with us to the end of the age, every promise that he makes that he will love us and he won't let more come into our lives than what we are able to bear, every promise that he makes has a giant "YES," a giant "IT IS CERTAIN" stamped on it by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Because the tomb couldn't hold Jesus, we know that we are forgiven. If our God loved us enough to live in our place and die in our place, if our God loved us enough to send the Spirit into our hearts through the Word or through the water and the Word at our Baptism, then he will not abandon us when these trials come. Then Satan's lies are exposed for what they are—lies. Our God does love us. He has given us new birth into a living hope. These trials and these difficulties come because we don't live in that perfect world. We are strangers on a journey in this world that leads us to the perfect world. Sin came into the world and with sin came grief, suffering and trials of every kind. When Jesus came into the world, forgiveness of sins came and the source of strength to sustain us through suffering, grief and trials.

It's also a reason why God puts us among our fellow Christians, so that we can encourage one another with the comfort we ourselves have received from our God. We don't have all the answers. We can't answer the question "why" and in reality we don't need to because we live in a sinful world. But we can answer the question "who." Who loves you? We can be certain Jesus loves us because he rose from the dead. We can answer the question "what." What has God promised us? He has promised to help us through all our difficulty and sustain us. We can answer the question "where." Where are those who die in the Lord? Where is our Lord leading us? That is to an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade which is kept in heaven for us. God does not tell us that will take away every bit of pain, but he does tell us it will sustain us and bring us comfort in our trials.

The glorious thing is that you and I get to be God's voice to remind each other of these truths when you and I begin to doubt them. When you and I begin to question God, we have our fellow believers there to lead us back to the certainty that Christ has risen! He has risen indeed!