



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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April 4, 2010
Easter Festival Worship
[1 Peter 1:3-9](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Exodus 15:1-11](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 118](#)
Second Lesson: [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#)
Gospel Lesson: [Luke 24:1-12](#)

A Living Hope

“Christ has risen, he has risen indeed.” Words of praise, right? What is praise other than to proclaim who the Lord is and what he has done? That’s what we heard Moses do in our First Lesson. That’s what we see Peter focusing upon, this incredible song of praise that centers on the resurrection of Jesus Christ and what it means for you and for me. It’s something that leads us to praise God, especially as you consider the blessings that it says that it has brought to us.

Remember the guy the Holy Spirit used to write these words? He was the guy that ran panting to catch up with John. John got to the tomb first, stood there and looked in but wouldn’t go in. Peter is the guy that got there right away and rushed in but didn’t understand what he saw. Now some 30 years later, he writes these words to Christians who were spread out and were enduring persecution. Now he knows what he saw. Now he knows what it means for him and for them and you can almost see the smile on his face and the gleam in his eyes as he writes to them and says, “Praise be the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

He takes the resurrection and kind of turns it around for us to look at and tells us all the things it means for us... “a living hope; new birth; an inheritance that can never perish; it’s kept in heaven for you; you are shielded by God’s power; it will be revealed in the last time; you can rejoice in all kinds of trials as they refine your faith which is of greater worth than gold.” He’s just overflowing with joy and praise at what God has done and what it means for these Christians who are dear to his heart who are suffering because they are God’s elect and had been scattered because of persecution and they were still undergoing persecution. They were still undergoing trials and they were facing a lot of difficult things.

But notice that he doesn’t start his letter with a lot of the things he would get to...what those trials mean for them and how God would use them. He doesn’t begin the letter with how they should submit themselves to the governing authorities even though they were being accused of being disloyal because they were Christians. He starts out with the center stone of the Christian life. He starts out with the resurrection of Jesus and how that assures us that we have a living hope. That living hope assures us that we are forgiven.

Who better to remind us that we are forgiven than Peter? Think of what Peter went through from that Thursday night when he was outside the High Priest's palace. He called down curses on himself to say "I don't know this Jesus guy that you are talking about," just as Jesus told him he was going to do. He had those days of Jesus in the grave now to go over and over those words of Christ and how he boldly proclaimed all the rest of them would fall away but he never would. Then he went and denied it and he said, "May I rot in hell rather than know that guy." Think of how he had to deal with the sting of his own words. Think of how often he had to relive that look of Jesus who looked at him across the courtyard when that rooster crowed.

So if there was someone who treasured forgiveness, it would be Peter. Peter was forgiven much, therefore he loved much. He wanted others to know this living hope that centers in the forgiveness of sins.

He says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He has given us new birth into a living hope." New birth...remember when Jesus had talked to Nicodemus about that? He told Nicodemus that you have to be born again to enter the kingdom of God. Nicodemus thought he was a little loopy. "You can't enter your mother's womb a second time. What are you talking about?" He had said, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit."

When we are born into this world, I don't care how healthy we are, I don't care how red your cheeks are, I don't care how many times you count the fingers and toes, each one of us is born spiritually stillborn. We are spiritually dead. We have nothing to offer God. We are separated from God. We are condemned by the sin that we are born with. That's why we need this new birth. That's what God tells us we have most certainly through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

A fourth century preacher once said that this first death came about through a virgin, a tree and death. He says that Eve took from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which God had said not to, and ate from it. Adam and Eve died. They were separated from God right then, right there, even though physically they didn't die until nine centuries later. This same preacher went on to say, "Isn't it amazing that the Lord brings it full circle. Through a virgin, His Son is born into the world. The God-man becomes our brother and takes on our infirmities, carries our sins, lives perfectly where you and I do not live perfectly, and then goes to another tree, the tree of the cross. There he carries all of our sins, endures the agony of hell as the punishment for our sins. Then by his death our sins are paid for. Now we have a new birth...the forgiveness of sins. And the certainty that this sacrifice was acceptable to the Father is the fact that Jesus rose. He was put to death for our sins. He was raised to life for our justification to assure us that we have been declared 'not guilty' through the life and death of Jesus." This message, that Jesus lived in our place and died in our place, has the power in and of itself that the Holy Spirit uses it to bring us to this new birth, this living hope, this kingdom of God. We are in this kingdom of God. When we have this living hope, we have a lasting inheritance. Peter focuses us on this when he says we have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

If you think of what our inheritance is like, you probably think first of all of heaven. You might wonder what heaven will be like. God uses a lot of different pictures in Scripture. He talks about it as a banquet. He talks about it as a wedding feast. He talks about it as a family reunion. He talks about it as a jewel-bedecked city. He uses all these different pictures and all these different things to help us to begin to imagine what heaven is like. They all depict aspects of heaven for us, but none of them give us a complete picture. Somehow, some way we know that there has to be more.

Paul once said that he was given a glimpse of heaven and he heard things that human words cannot express. So this idea that we sense that there is something even more than we can begin to imagine now is right. Our inheritance is greater than we can ask for. Our inheritance is greater than we can imagine. Notice how Peter begins to try to convey that to us when he says our inheritance is an inheritance that could never perish, spoil or fade.

Think of how many things in this lifetime perish, spoil and fade. I'm not just talking about the stuff that gets tucked behind something in the back of the fridge. I'm talking about the things that we value, the things that we trust, the things we think are going to be our deliverance. Those inheritances of wealth can be gone in an instant. They can be destroyed. Markets can crash. These things that we depend on can be gone. But what we have in heaven is kept in heaven for us. God himself watches over it. God himself protects it and us. Therefore, we know that it won't perish, spoil or fade.

Even beyond that, he tells us there is something more. In the here and now, he tells us we are now shielded by God's power until the coming of that salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this we can greatly rejoice now. Now we enjoy the blessings of eternal life. Now we enjoy it, yes imperfectly, but we know that we are forgiven. We know that heaven is open to us. We know that we have a purpose that is greater than what we can see or how we can define ourselves by what we possess. We have the purpose of living to glorify and honor a God who loved us this much...that he lived in our place and died in our place, that he stretched out his arms on the cross, that he rose again so that we may know for certain that we are forgiven.

This is what we have that shields us, but this is why Peter uses this strange term, a living hope. If the hope isn't living, it's no hope at all. It's gone, right? He uses this term living hope because the people he was writing to were probably being challenged by Satan to believe that this hope was gone. They were being persecuted. They were suffering. Satan, no doubt, was asking them, "Where is your God?" Those that had no use for Christianity were saying to them, "Where is your God? Some hope you've got. You're enduring difficulties that are far beyond those who don't know your God. Of what use or of what value is your God?" That's why they needed to be reminded that it is a living hope. You and I need this reminder too. Sometimes we want to put our trust and confidence in things that are not.

I used to live in a state that had elected a former pro wrestler to be their governor. That former wrestler once said in some speech or in some interview, I don't remember

which, he really basically just said that religion is a crutch for people that are too weak to handle things on their own. He had it kind of right. People that are too weak to handle things on their own need crutches. I'm telling you that every last person in this world is too weak to handle this world on their own, so they use crutches. The crutch of their wealth. The crutch of their friends. The crutch of their health. They think that's going to get them through whatever difficulties come because they'll be able to handle it with all those things.

But here is the thing...when you live in a sinful world, those crutches get knocked out from under you at times, don't they? Your health can be gone. Your wealth can disappear. Your friends can disappear. They can turn on you. You can suffer when you live for Christ. When these crutches are gone, you are left with seeing what the only true thing is that supports you. That is the love of God in Christ Jesus. When we go to that, I don't care, call it a crutch, I don't care. I need it to support me because I'm not strong enough to get through things on my own. I can't take away my sin on my own. I certainly am not strong enough on my own to face living in a sinful world and all the trials that come from living under the cross. So yes, I will call it a crutch. I don't care. I'm not too ashamed to admit I need that to lean on.

You know how sometimes we get a little bucky and don't want to say we need a cane? You and I need Christ. When we are in the midst of this suffering and this difficulty, where all those temporary crutches are knocked out from under us, when instead of falling flat on our face our heavenly Father catches us in his everlasting loving arms, then we say, "I can rejoice in my suffering because my suffering drives me to Christ. It drives me to my Bible. It shows me that my God loves me through and through and that he will never disappoint me."

So we can say, "In this we greatly rejoice, though now for a little while we may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 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."

What a feast that Peter spreads out before us as we take Jesus' resurrection and turn it like a gem and look at all the different facets of it, this living hope of forgiveness, this living hope of an everlasting inheritance, this living hope of joy even in suffering. This is a feast that is like none other. This is ours, not just this day but every day of our lives as we walk close to our Savior.

As we walk close to him, we can say with Peter, "Though we have not seen him, we love him; and even though we don't see him now, we believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for we are receiving the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls."