

Easter Sunday 2018
 1 Peter 1:3-9 free
 Heading Home...Heartened and Hopeful

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! And, I could preach forever about Easter. And, this Easter service could go on forever! Oh, no! I wouldn't do that, especially on Easter. But the fact is, IT WILL. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and we are going to rise with him and our life will go on forever. "In my Father's house are many rooms," Jesus says. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2-3). Easter means that we are we are heading home and getting closer all the time. As Isaiah says it, we "shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, 'Be strong; fear not!'" (Isaiah 35:3-4). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is heading us home, heartened and full of hope.

We often lose heart. When St. Peter wrote to Christians long ago, he said, "You rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials." Isn't that the truth? Think about all the trials and troubles that come your way. Some of you had your heart ripped out this past year by the death of a loved one. Problems in relationships, problems at work or lack of work, financial worries, health worries . . . it seems we are just waiting for the next shoe to drop. And persecution -- That was a big issue for the people to whom Peter wrote. You and I are not physically persecuted for being Christians, but when we honor God by keeping the commandments, we are often slandered and shunned. We lose heart and wonder: Where is God? Why are you doing this God?

St. Peter tells us where God is and what He's doing, "Now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith -- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire -- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." In those times when you lose heart, when you wonder what God is doing, God is in fact refining your faith. Strange as it seems to our reason, God uses adversities to draw us more and more to Himself. We love to sing the hymn, "Just as I am":

Just as I am, without one plea
 But that Thy blood was shed for me
 And that thou bidd'st me come to thee,
 O Lamb of God, I come, I come. (LSB 570:1)

That's true enough, but what we often forget is that God loves you and me too much to leave us just as we are. Trial by trial, tear by tear, year by year, God is refining our faith. And where is God? He's in Jesus Christ, the One who suffered but by His resurrection and ascension is now in glory. Slowly but surely God is leading you and me to depend solely upon His goodness to us in Jesus Christ.

How does the resurrection of Jesus Christ put heart back into us when we're going through tough times? The answer is "mercy." Listen to words of St. Peter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." As we talked about in one of our midweek services, God's great mercy is not just a feeling of pity; it's specific, hands-on acts of loving-kindness that God does for us and we in turn do for one another.

We know God's chief mercy from the much-loved Bible passage, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Because of our sin, we return to the dust from which we came. Because of sin, we lose heart. So, God sent His own Son to take on our sin, all its wages of death, all that causes us to lose hope, and He carried them all to the cross of Good Friday. There, He died to overcome all that robs us of hope. He was buried in the tomb's dark portal. But, the 3rd day, He rose again, bringing life and immortality to light. Death is swallowed up forever in the Easter resurrection of Christ.

Peter says we have been "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." "Hope" is one of those words we bandy around, even in church, but what does it really mean? Sometimes, "hope" seems like a pie-in-the-sky thing. You know, "I hope we get rain this summer." "I hope the Twins make it to the World Series." Maybe it will happen; maybe it won't. The world talks about hope in a wishy-washy way, because there is no guarantee it comes true.

The hope that the Bible talks about is sure and certain. In fact, those are the words we use at the graveside in the committal service, "We commit this body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal

life through our Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body". Our hope is sure and certain because it's based upon the Easter resurrection of Jesus. God will keep His Easter promises. "If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him . . . If we are faithless, he remains faithful— for He cannot deny himself," the Bible says (2 Tm 2:11–13). All the Father's good promises to you are "Yes" in Christ, St. Paul comforts us (2 Cor 1:20).

We will rise to eternal life in Christ Jesus and reign over all that causes us to lose hope because we have been "Born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven". That is what happened in the new birth of your baptism. You were "born again" in Christ Jesus and that means you have an inheritance "kept in heaven for you." For you! There is a place reserved in heaven for you! Don't be complacent and allow the world to squeeze into its mold. Don't listen to the lies of the father of all lies and fall to for his temptations. Surround yourself with God's Word and confidence in His mercies. Remember the gifts God gave you in your baptism. Come to the Lord's Table to eat and drink the life-giving Body and Blood of Jesus. "You who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this – in this -- you rejoice."

He brings me to the portal
That leads to bliss untold,
Whereon this rhyme immortal
Is found in script of gold:
"Who there My cross has shared
Finds here a crown prepared;
Who there with Me has died
Shall here be glorified. (*LSB* 467:7)