

We Have a Living Hope!

1 Pet. 1:3

--CEFC 4/12/20 (Easter)

In these days of social isolation,
with no baseball to entertain,
the economy in shambles
and a very contagious and potentially fatal virus on a rampage,
where do you go to look for hope?

Our government leaders do their best--

“My fellow Americans, we will get through this,” the Vice President says.

“This virus won’t last forever,” Dr. Fauci says

“The economy will come roaring back,” the President says.

“Congress will keep giving out money,” they all say.

Does that help?

In our effort to find hope, we may replay certain lines in our heads--

like, “It only kills old people.”

But that doesn’t work for everybody.

Or we could say, “Our scientists will bail us out.”

“It won’t be long before there is a vaccine,

and everything will go back to normal.”

Maybe.

Then there’s comfort food—that can help.

Ice cream, especially.

Chocolate is my favorite.

Unfortunately, there are also drugs and alcohol.

I've heard that the government of California

has declared marijuana dispensaries an "essential business."

But that's not hope, that's denial.

But all those things that people do to cope,

and all that our government leaders do to encourage, is that enough?

What about those who actually suffer--I mean, really suffer—

those who suffer not just the loss of their senior prom,

but of their mom or dad?

What will encourage them?

What about those who find it hard to breath,

and then lose their breath altogether?

That is, what about those who face death—

is there any hope for them? /

So much of what I read in my newsfeed may be helpful in some ways,

but it seems to deal with symptoms rather than the real disease—

that is, the real dis-ease that we experience in all this—

that feeling of anxiety below the surface—

which someone has compared to apps on our phone that keep running,

draining the battery.

There are those nagging questions running in the background of our minds--

What is really going on here?

Is the world hostile to my existence?

Is the evil of this plague the final reality?

Does my happiness depend on my economic prosperity?

Is my health dependent on my government's ability

to shield me from a tiny virus?

What do I really depend on for my security?

for my happiness?

What is my life really all about, after all?

How would I react if death came knocking at my door?

Rarely do people consciously ask themselves questions like these,

especially questions about death.

We insulate ourselves from such things

by staying overly busy with work

and incessantly entertained by looking at our screens.

That keeps us sufficiently distracted or amused

so as to avoid having to actually reflect.

We keep ourselves safely protected from those existential issues.

In normal times, we shelter under a secular canopy,

a shield that keeps our attention focused exclusively on the here and now,

the material, the tangible,

the horizontal rather than the vertical dimensions of reality.

I liken this secular world to a domed football stadium.

Inside that dome we have complete control—

or, at least, that is our ambition.

There's nothing outside that roof that we have to worry about.

The bright sun never gets in the players' eyes--

all the light is artificial and carefully positioned.

We don't have to be concerned about rain or snow.

The players and the fans can stay dry

and enjoy a perfect 72-degree environment.

It's our little world.

And nothing outside that stadium dictates what goes on inside.

We even make up the rules of the game—

rules meant to maximize our entertainment,

and we like it that way. /

But in the disturbance and dislocation of these days,

some cracks have emerged in that secular dome.

Life is not quite as predictable and controllable as we thought.

And through those cracks

some light from above and beyond has begun to shine through.

Maybe that's happening to you.

Isn't it funny how God has a way of getting our attention.

And right now, he seems to be shaking up the whole world,

like dice in a cup,

and we have no idea what number will come up

when the dice hit the table.

What does the future hold?

Is it sickness or even death?

Perhaps a deep economic depression?

Who can say?

So where can you find hope—real hope—in such a world?

That's what I want to talk about on this Easter morning--

the hope—the real and ultimate hope—

that is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Peter in the beginning of his first letter states it plainly:

1Pet. 1:3—"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,

and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you,"

As followers of Jesus Christ, we have a **living** hope, Peter says.

It's a **living** hope, as opposed to a dead or a false hope.

And there are plenty of those false hopes around--

the false hope in science as the remedy to all our ills—I don't think so.

the false hope in medicine

to keep us alive and healthy forever—

nope, don't believe that anymore.

the false hope in politics, whether Republican or Democratic,

as the way to utopia—

Nobody has all the answers, that's for sure!

“False hopes are more dangerous than fears,” said J.R.R. Tolkein,
perhaps because when false hopes are dashed,
we are left with nothing but despair.

Beware of false hopes,
for there is but one living hope--
the hope of God's saving work in the person of Jesus Christ.
For this living hope comes from the “**living God**.”

The “**living God**”—that expression occurs 28 times in the Bible—
The “**living God**” is set in contrast to all the other so-called gods
that people look to, and trust in, and are tempted to worship.

After speaking of the empty idols of his day,
the prophet Jeremiah declares—
“**But the LORD—Yahweh, the God of Israel—
He is the true God;
he is the living God, the eternal King.
When he is angry, the earth trembles;
the nations cannot endure his wrath**” (Jer. 10:10¹).

Speaking to a pagan audience in Lystra
who wanted to make sacrifices to their Greek gods,
The Apostle Paul said,

¹ cf. John 5:26 “**For as the Father has life in himself,
so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.**”

“We are bringing you good news,
telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God,
who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them” (Acts 14:15).

This living hope comes from the living God—

it is true, it is genuine, it is the real thing.

Nothing can compare to it—

nothing else comes close.

It is that living hope that Peter proclaims to us,

and I want us to look at three ways that he describes this living hope--

three dimensions that give real “life”

to this distinctively Christian vision.

First, I want you to see that this living hope is **a well-grounded hope**.

That’s important, for not all hopes are.

There's a line about hope that I've always liked that comes from Samuel Johnson,

who, upon hearing of a man who remarried

immediately after the death of a wife

with whom he had been very unhappy,

said, “That, sir, is the triumph of hope over experience.”

Well, the Christian has a hope **based on experience**--

it is the experience of Jesus Christ.

Our hope is grounded in a fact of history--

 this living hope, Peter says,

 is **"through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."**

Our word "hope" can be pretty flimsy—

 serving as little more than a vague wish²--

 as in "I hope that it doesn't rain tomorrow,

 or "I hope that the Nationals repeat as World Series Champions."

But this **living hope** is not like that—

 It is a settled conviction about the future

 grounded in what has taken place in the past.

This living hope is grounded in the fact that Jesus was raised from the grave.

Let me refer you to earliest written record of that event—

 the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

Paul writes this:

1Cor. 15:3--**"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance:**

that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

that he was buried,

that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time,

most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep."

² Paul can use the word this way. cf. e.g., 1Cor. 16:7 For I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I **hope** to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits."

Notice very carefully—

Paul is writing in the mid 50s,

and he is referring to what he told the Corinthians several years before that,

but which he had received well before that.

Paul is talking about something that really happened;

an event in real history

reported to him by eyewitnesses

within just a few years of its occurrence.

Jesus of Nazareth was really crucified--

if you ran your hand along that cross you'd get real splinters;

and Jesus spilt real red blood.

That same Jesus died, and they laid him in a tomb,

just as they would any other corpse.

And on the third day that same Jesus was really raised from the dead

into a new and glorified form of life--

and his tomb was empty.

This is what actually happened, Paul says.

Check it out with the eyewitnesses.

They're still alive, most of them.

See what they have to say.

Jesus wasn't just raised to life "in the hearts and minds of those who loved him"—

We're talking about an objective, space-time event here--

not some inner feeling,

not some merely subjective, mystical experience

that may simply help us cope with the harsh realities of life.

That's rubbish, Paul would say—

the tomb was empty.

His body was not there.

If it was, it would have been taken from that tomb by the religious leaders
and paraded around Jerusalem,
and the whole Christian movement would have died a sudden death.

Jesus was raised from the dead,

And his was no mere resuscitation—a return to life as it was before.

His was a resurrection—it was a transformation into a new form of life.

It was the beginning of a new creation.

He had a body, but that body had a new kind of physicality—

it was glorified and was now animated fully by the Spirit,

as different from his former body

as these beautiful lilies are

from the seeds from which they came.

And that, the Bible tells us, is a glory we, too, will one day share. /

Death is still mysterious, to be sure,

but we have no reason to fear it,

for we can know who will be there waiting for us on the other side—

it will be Jesus, risen and glorious,

ready to receive us to himself.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled." Jesus said.

"Trust in God; trust also in me.

In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you.

I am going there to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you,

I will come back and take you to be with me

that you also may be where I am" (Jn. 14:1-3).

The Bible says that Jesus came

to "break the power of him who holds the power of death . . .

and free those who all their lives

were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Heb. 2:14,15).

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Heb. 6:19).

We have a reason for the hope that we have (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15).

Our hope is well-grounded in the historical reality of Jesus' resurrection.

An in my moments of doubt, when I wonder whether all this Christian stuff is just fantasy,

I find it helpful to come back to this foundational truth—

Jesus Christ really rose from the grave.

It's a fact of history. /

The resurrection of Jesus gives us a living hope--

For you see, it is quite simple--

If Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead,

no situation is beyond hope.

Let me repeat that--

If Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead,

no situation is beyond hope.

The cross appeared to signal the victory of evil--

the enemies of Jesus mocked this would-be Messiah--

when he was hanging on a cross like a common criminal.

God had come in the flesh to do battle, but Satan had won.

Or had he?

The empty tomb turned the tables.

Through his resurrection,

what appeared to be total defeat was transformed into a glorious triumph.

We have a living hope

"through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"

for the resurrection demonstrates that nothing, nothing at all, can frustrate

the gracious purposes of God.

Not even a cross.

God can snatch victory out of apparent defeat—in any situation.

He gives hope where there is only despair.

In the resurrection of Jesus God has conquered sin and death--

Now tell me, what problem in your life is too big for him?

If God raised Jesus from the dead,

we are never without hope.

This is a living hope—for we have a living Savior--

Jesus is risen from the grave.

Our living hope is a well-grounded hope.

Our hope in the present is grounded in an event of the past.

And as we look to the future, we can be confident about what awaits us there.

Look at the way Peter describes this living hope as a **certain hope**—

We have “**an inheritance,**” he says,

“**that can never perish, spoil or fade—**

it is kept in heaven for you.” /

One of the most generous things my mother did before she died

was to set up an education fund for her grandchildren

in the form of **an Irrevocable Trust.**

An irrevocable trust is a financial arrangement

in which some property is held for the benefit of someone

in an arrangement that cannot be revoked —

meaning it cannot be changed, modified or cancelled.

It is permanent, fixed, abiding, enduring.

The money the trust contains can only be used

for the benefit of the person for whom it was created.

Peter says that our inheritance as believers

is preserved for us in just such an irrevocable trust—

It can't be revoked—it's locked in.

And unlike an earthly trust—

this one is not dependent on the variations in the stock market.

Its value is fixed forever by God.

Nothing that happens in this world—

none of our earthly circumstances can threaten it or change it.

It is kept, preserved, by God himself in the heavenly realms

where moth or rust cannot destroy

and thieves cannot break in and steal.

Our inheritance “**can never perish, spoil or fade**” Peter says.

That’s our certain hope.

It is a future reality, but it has very present implications.

For Peter says that **we** who have this inheritance

“are shielded through faith by God's power

until the coming of the salvation

that is ready to be revealed in the last time. “

We are kept in the present in anticipation of that future.

Our heavenly Father wants us to know that that inheritance

will not go unclaimed by its rightful heirs—

he will see to it himself.

We are “***shielded* by God’s power**”—

Here Paul uses a word that suggests

the work of a military sentry whose job is to keep watch

so as to prevent a hostile invasion.³

³ So Thayer.

How does God shield us?

Through the work of the very same Son who died for us.

Because Jesus is risen from the grave,

he is alive today.

And he himself is engaged in this shielding, guarding work.

He now provides protective cover through his own intercessory prayer for us.

We may be under attack from the devil—that accuser of God’s people.

But his allegations against us will not get a hearing.

As Paul says in Rom. 8--

“Who then is the one who condemns?

No one.

Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—

is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (8:34).

He is our attorney for the defense,

and he has the ear of the judge.

The Son intercedes for us with the Father—

Will he not hear that prayer?

Of course he will!

In Hebrews we have another image—

that of a priest who intercedes for his people.

Heb. 7:23 **“Now there have been many of those priests [of the Old Covenant],**

since death prevented them from continuing in office;

but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.

Therefore he is able to save completely

those who come to God through him,

because he always lives to intercede for them.”

What a great promise!

Jesus as our high priest always lives to intercede for us.

What greater power could there possibly be?

Through our faith in this Jesus

we “are shielded by God's power

until the coming of the salvation

that is ready to be revealed in the last time. “

What a certain hope we have—

this is something that gives me great comfort.

As it says in that wonderful hymn:

When I fear my faith will fail

Christ will hold me fast.

When the tempter would prevail

He will hold me fast.

I could never keep my hold

Through life's fearful path.

For my love is often cold,

He must hold me fast.

He will hold me fast

He will hold me fast

*For my Savior loves me so
He will hold me fast.*

Our living hope is a certain hope—
for whatever may happen—
even in this Covid-19 plague,
we are shielded by God's power,
He will keep us safe until the end,
when we will receive that glorious inheritance
**'that can never perish, spoil or fade—
kept in heaven for us.'**

As I think of an inheritance,
my mind goes to a PBS Masterpiece series that Susan and I have been watching
in these shelter-at-home
days.

It's an 18th century British period piece called *Sanditon*,
and it is based on an unfinished novel by Jane Austin,
and it is very Jane Austin-esk,
if you know what I mean!
with lots of glamorous balls with lords and ladies dressed in their finest attire.
One of the central plotlines involves a very wealthy aunt, Lady Denham
who is childless and nearing death.
Various extended family members –especially Clara and Esther—
are vying for Lady Denham's affections
in the hope of gaining a substantial inheritance.
(We haven't finished it, so please don't spoil it for us.)

I'm afraid that's how many people think of the Christian life.

We try hard to impress God so that, somehow, we might win his favor
and gain a glorious inheritance.

But that's not it at all!

Look at where Peter begins in this passage—

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

In his great mercy he has given us new birth into this living hope”

This living hope that is ours,
comes to us not because of the good things we have done
but because of God's mercy.

It is in virtue of his great mercy
that God has given us new birth
into this living hope.

God gives us what we don't deserve.

In his grace, he does for us what we could never do for ourselves.

This inheritance is not something we earn—
it is a gift of God's mercy. /

But there's more to it than that.

Esther and Clara had to curry the favor of Lady Denham to get an inheritance
because she had no
children—

there was no one who had the legal right to her wealth.

But that's not true of our God—

He has a Son, a first born—the legal heir to all his riches.

And through our faith in this Jesus, the Son of God,

we are joined to him in a union of the Spirit

such that what is true of him now becomes true of us also—

We are now adopted into his family,

we now share in his sonship.

And as Paul writes,

“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—

heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:16-17)

So you could say, though this inheritance comes to us as a gift,

it is also ours by right,

simply because in Christ, our God has given us new birth

into his family as his own children.

In his great mercy God has given us new birth into this living hope.

Now, who can claim any merit, any congratulations, for having been born?

It's not something you can boast about!

Being born biologically is nothing if not a gift.

In being born, we receive the gift of physical life in God's world.

Here Peter is talking about a birth, but of a different kind—a spiritual birth.

God, in his grace, gives us a new spiritual birth into his wonderful family.

In this new birth, our eyes are opened to the beauty of the cross of Christ
as an act of love to atone for our sin.

And our hearts are changed,
so that instead begin repulsed by Christ's demand
as our Lord and King
for our total allegiance,
we are drawn to him.

We want to submit to him and to follow him
and to turn to him in faith.

This is his work, not ours.

It is a result of his mercy, not our good sense or our good deeds.

It is a gift.

This living hope that we now have in Christ is his gift to us,
and it assures us of a wonderful inheritance,
which is kept for us by God's power.

Nothing can ever take it away.

That's why Peter begins the way he does:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

He deserves our praise—for our hope comes from him.

For our ultimate hope is that we may be in his presence
that we may behold his beauty in a new and glorious way.

But for now, we wait,
we endure,

we hope.

“My fellow Americans, we should get through this.”

“This virus probably won’t last forever”

“The economy might come roaring back,”

and “Congress may keep giving out money.”

We’ll see.

But we need a hope that goes much deeper than any of that.

We need the hope that the God who created the heavens and the earth,

the God who rules over the universe,

the God who even controls that tiny coronavirus—

we need the hope that in whatever happens,

that God is for us,

that God is with us,

and that God will see us through to a glorious end.

That’s the hope we need—

a living hope that comes to us from the living God.

And that is what we have when we put our trust in Jesus Christ—

who died for our sin

and who rose again, defeating death forever.

If you are a Christian believer here this morning—a follower of Jesus Christ—

take this living hope to heart.

Hold on to it, and don’t let go.

Live in the light of it,

and, I assure you, you will have light, even in the darkest night.

You will get through this—

and anything else that comes your way—

you will get through it gloriously!

But if you have never made a commitment to Jesus—

if you have never turned away from yourself

and turned to Christ in faith,

I would ask you to consider—

where does your hope come from?

Is it grounded in some vague optimism about life—

that somehow everything works for the best?

or maybe you simply believe that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

But what if it does kill you—what then?

All this talk about death may make some uncomfortable—

I pray that none of us will get sick and die,

but it will happen some day, you can be sure of it.

The death rate for human beings, last I looked,

was still at 100%.

And if what you trust in can't deal with death,

it can't deal with life, either.

Only a living hope can do that—

and it is ours through faith in the risen Jesus.

Turn to him and it can be yours.

Prayer—

He is risen! and we have hope.

Easter Sunday

April 12, 2020

We Have a Living Hope!

1 Pet. 1:3-5

These are perilous and uncertain days, and we are led to question where our real hope lies. On this Easter we are given something far greater than anything this world can provide—a living hope based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

We Have a “*Living Hope*”---

I. Our Living Hope is a Well-Grounded Hope—

It is “through the resurrection

of Jesus Christ from the dead”

II. Our Living Hope is a Certain Hope—

It is “an inheritance

that can never perish, spoil or fade—

kept in heaven for you”

III. Our Living Hope is a Merciful Hope—

*“In his great mercy he has given us new birth”
into this living hope.*

Where Is Your Hope?

Sermon Response:

We Have a Living Hope!

1 Pet. 1:3-5

- Why is hope so important to us? What is it and what does it do? Why do we need it?
- How does the resurrection of Jesus give you hope?
- What is the “inheritance” that Peter talks about? What attraction do you feel toward it?
How can it give you hope?
- On what do you base your hope that you will remain faithful until the end?
- Spend time praying, giving thanks to God for the living hope that is ours. Pray for those without that hope—and pray that you may be used by God to bring that hope to them.