

**+ 1 Peter 1:3-9 + Living Hope Looks to the Living Savior +
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 2nd Sunday of Easter + 23 April 2017 +**

CIR HIRI!¹

Hope is a funny thing. It looks to the possible. I hope the weather gets warmer soon. I hope my team wins the championship. I hope I pass this test. I hope I make it through this job interview. I hope I can retire before I'm physically unable to work. I hope she'll say, "Yes," to my proposal. I hope our offer on the house will go through. I hope this movie has a happy ending. I hope he gets better. I hope our situation improves. I hope. I hope. I hope.

Hope looks to the possible, but how hopeful you are depends on how much trust you put in the unknown or the unseen. That's what makes hope a funny thing. How much do you trust weather forecasts? How certain are you about the ability of your team to overcome the ability of the opposing team? How well do you know the material on the test that someone else wrote or how much does a company want the skills you have? While hope should be more certain when a young man makes a proposal, the answer is always dependent on the young lady receiving the proposal. How certain are you that a seller will accept your offer on their home? How certain are you that health or your family's situation will improve? Unless you check out a spoiler-filled review of a movie, how certain can you be that a director won't throw a curveball at the end of the movie? How certain is your hope?

We like to use the term "hope" because we love to have hope, but rarely do we buy in completely to that hope. You hedge your bets so you don't fail too badly if things don't work out. There always seems to be a little, cynical voice in the back of your mind asking, "Are you sure this is going to happen? Are you sure this is going to work?" That little voice is called doubt, and doubt makes an "I know so" hope into an "I hope so" hope or even a hopeless hope.

A man named Peter knew that kind of hope all too well. There was a time when Peter felt like he was on top of the world. He had been following Jesus for three years, but he wasn't just any follower. He was part of Jesus' inner circle. He got to see some amazing things as part of that inner circle. Peter had even become something of an outspoken leader among Jesus' closest followers. So he was on top of the world as Jesus made his way towards Jerusalem. Peter was full of hope in the possibilities of what could happen if he stuck with Jesus. The sky was the limit—and that made Peter bold. When Jesus and his disciples gathered to celebrate the Passover, Peter had boldly claimed, ***"Even if everyone falls away because of you, I will never fall away...Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you."*** (Matthew 26:33,35)

...But the very evening he said that, Peter's overconfident hope started to crumble. Just a couple hours after his statement, when Jesus told Peter, James, and John to ***"watch and pray"*** with him, they kept falling asleep. (Matthew 26:41) When Jesus' disciple Judas Iscariot showed up with a group of armed guards, Peter, who was no trained soldier, awkwardly yanked out a sword and clipped off part of someone's ear only to have Jesus tell him to put the sword away as he healed the man. As Jesus allowed himself to be arrested, ***"all the disciples [including Peter] deserted him and fled."*** (Matthew 26:56) So much for boldness!

Peter followed Jesus to the home of the Jewish high priest, but things didn't get any better there. Ashamed of his earlier behavior, Peter wanted to prove that he would stand by Jesus no matter what. However, pressed by a few servants in the courtyard, Peter denied knowing Jesus at all not just once or twice, but three times! Overtaken by grief, fear, and doubt, Peter lost whatever hope he had left. He denied and deserted Jesus just as Jesus had foretold. As the rooster crowed, Peter was shattered, and ran away weeping.

In the couple days that followed, we know where Peter wasn't. He wasn't anywhere near Jesus as his best friend was put to death on the cross. Peter was nowhere to be found because he was in hiding somewhere as his bold claims haunted him. ***"Even if everyone falls away because of you, I will never fall"***

At that point, Peter didn't even have an "I hope so" hope. He felt hopeless and afraid. He was as full of doubt and uncertainty like the rest of the disciples hiding behind locked doors. His future full of guilt looked pretty bleak, but then Sunday came...and so did Jesus. There was no loud crash through the door. The living Savior simply stood there in the middle of the room with words of peace flowing from his lips. Peter wasn't in heaven yet. He was still in that room. The world was still full of sin and death, but right then everything changed. All was not lost. Peter's guilt and shame melted away. His despair disappeared, and his heart filled with true, living hope in Christ.

¹ "Christ is risen!" "He is risen indeed!" This is known as the Paschal Greeting, one of the oldest and most widespread traditions in the Christian church. Throughout the weeks of the Easter season, whenever the minister says to the people, "Christ is risen!", they respond loudly and boldly, "He is risen indeed!"

Peter was never the same again. Gone was the man who had fled in the garden and who had failed so miserably in the courtyard. Here was a new man **“given...new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...”** That Peter wrote the words of our text as living hope that looks to the living Savior filled his heart and life.

As Peter wrote, he couldn't help, but remember the stunned reaction of his fellow disciple Thomas at the sight of the risen Jesus. **“My Lord and my God!”** (John 20:28) He remembered what Jesus had said. **“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”** (John 20:29) He knew those words of blessing would comfort his readers—fellow Christians enduring suffering at the hands of others, fellow Christians facing the ridicule and rejection from their pagan friends and loved ones, fellow Christians facing jail and violence, suffering **“grief in various trials.”** They desperately needed hope—not an “I hope so” hope, but living hope that looks to the living Savior.

What those suffering Christians needed is also what you and I need. How often aren't we on the receiving end of a reminder that we're not in heaven yet, that sin, guilt, and death still fill the world around us? How often don't you and I tumble down from a peak of pride as life seems to crumble around us? Loved ones get sick. Relationships break apart. Income stops or slows to a trickle. Bodies and minds break down. Expectations fail. People don't come through. Death rears its ugly head, and we live in a society becoming more opposed to Christ every day. People face persecution for their faith around the world, while we're being lulled into spiritual death by the culture around us teamed up with our own sinful natures. It's tough to have hope in anything and anyone, let alone confident hope of any kind.

So what does Peter tell us? **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of 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 is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.”** Remember that phrase that we said over and over again last Sunday and have said a couple times today? **CIR HIRI!** So how does that impact your life right now? Easter isn't just another holiday on the calendar.

No, Jesus defied all human expectations and actually came back from the dead. He abandoned his tomb and conquered death, but it wasn't just for him or to prove what his heavenly Father had promised. No, all of that happened because of God's great, huge, superabundant, unending, amazing mercy. Jesus was raised from the dead to give you new life, to give you new birth, to give you something you can neither generate in yourself nor find anywhere else. Through that rebirth, Jesus gives you the living hope of a heavenly inheritance **“that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading...”**

Parents typically want to make sure their children are well taken care of. So they take out insurance policies, set up trusts, and have wills written up. That way everything is set in case they should die before their children move out on their own. If it's set up properly, that inheritance cannot be taken away. Did you ever realize that God did something similar for you and me?

In sending his Son, our heavenly Father got everything set so you would have a heavenly inheritance. He made sure that his Son was born at the appointed time. He made sure that his Son lived a life free of doubt and guilt, shame and sin in your place because there was no way you were going to earn or even deserve that heavenly inheritance. Yet what has to happen for an inheritance to kick in? A loved one dies. In the case of Jesus, he had to die. For you to receive the eternal inheritance of heaven, Jesus had to give his life on the cross. His death was the only way that heaven could be yours. Then rising from the dead, Jesus guaranteed that heaven would be yours. So now you have an inheritance that is death-proof, time-proof, and sin-proof. It belongs to you even now! That means you can rejoice that you are already heirs of heaven—long before you get to enjoy the benefits of heaven itself.

Now you know that Jesus lives, and that means you can be sure of God's love for you. You have living hope! Because you can see what God has given you, why God has given all that to you, and how God gave all that to you, you now have peace with God. That even helps you to see that there's a purpose for the suffering and trials you endure in this life. **“You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”**

The glorious inheritance we possess remains hidden beneath the trials and hardships we suffer as Christians. Yet we rejoice. How is that possible? How can we still rejoice even amid tears? Peer into Christ's empty tomb. Examine his pierced hands and feet and side, and see the reason why. Now Satan, our sinful world, and your sinful nature want to destroy your faith in Christ. So they try to remove every earthly prop that could be seen as

evidence that God loves you. Wealth dries up. Friends desert you. Health gives way to disease and old age. Finally, you're left with nothing, but Jesus. Yet even with everything else gone, what other reason do you need for hope?

Yes, you don't see the living Savior when he promises to bless you, but don't give up hope. Instead look to Jesus and enjoy the peace that comes from his resurrection blessing, ***"Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe."*** By faith, we love him though we have not seen him. We believe in him though we do not see him now. We are filled with joy because we are already receiving the goal of our faith—the salvation of our souls! Let your living hope look to the living Savior! **CIR HIRI!** Alleluia! Amen.