

Context: I Peter 1:3-9

Text: I Peter 1:3

A Living Hope

“And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, ‘Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.’”

Easter is always with us. Easter was the day Mary and Salome walked into an empty tomb. Easter is today in 1999. Easter is tomorrow and eternity. The Apostle Peter said it beautifully. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”*

Our Christian faith stands or falls on the reality and believability of the resurrection. The Apostle Paul summed it up this way. *“Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain...If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”*

If there is one word spoken from the mouth of the empty tomb, it is the word hope. Resurrection means that we live in a culture of hope. Resurrection means that hope intrudes on everything that winds its way toward death. Resurrection makes a mess of despondency and fatalism. Resurrection means that hope intervenes in our lives every day whether we like it or not. Today I want to suggest three of these ways.

The first is hope from yesterday. The beauty of Easter is that *God does not hold our past against us or hold us to our past.* Remember what Paul said? *“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”* Easter hope reminds us that **we are no longer in our sins.** We are not daily tied to yesterday. God does not hold yesterday’s sins and mistakes against us. It means that we do our God, our faith, and ourselves a grave disservice if we choose to allow the sins of yesterday to control our lives today. We do this through guilt, habit, or hurt. It also means that God releases us from the hold yesterdays can have on us. Yesterdays have a way of sticking to us like flypaper through such things as bitterness, resentment, fear and self-pity. Yesterdays can grab our lives and the lives of others in endless stickiness. But hope intrudes and interferes and says look for the light not the darkness.

There is a touching story of a gifted young Midwestern lawyer who suffered such deep depression that his friends thought the wisest course of action would be to keep all his knives and razors away from him. During this time the lawyer wrote, “I am now the

most miserable man living. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell. I awfully forebode I shall not.”

How often is it that we look behind us and see every turn in the road where we made a mistake; every weakness that caused hurt to ourselves or someone else; every commandment we broke; every pain we ever felt? Looking back will more often cause us to look down instead of up; look away rather than look ahead; look at our wounds rather than the wounds of the Savior in our place. There may be some days or many days when we say along with this young lawyer, “I am the most miserable man or woman living.”

The young lawyer eventually grabbed hold of the hope of his faith and walked out of his dark tunnel. He recovered and become one of America’s most loved presidents. His name was Abraham Lincoln. He was one of God’s beloved children, just as you and I. We must pay close attention to the writer of Hebrews when he says, *“Let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...”* Hope frees us from yesterday.

The second way Easter hope intrudes is that it gives us hope *in* today. Easter hope gives us the courage to channel our energy, talents, and efforts into the present moment. *Hope says there is a tomorrow, so we have freedom to live fully today.* When tomorrow feels hopeless, today feels miserable. When the women, in their sadness, went to the tomb of Jesus they found two extraordinary sights. The huge stone that sealed the door of the tomb was rolled away; and the linen that encased the dead body of Jesus set aside in a heap.

In the famous “Peanuts” comic strip, Charles Shultz created the character of Linus. Linus, as you know, tenaciously clings to his security blanket. Wherever he goes or whatever he does, Linus must have his blanket. He feels insecure without it. This may be humorous, but actually all of us have our security blankets of one kind or another.

Our greatest anxieties stem from who values us and on what basis. God values us enough to call us His child today so He can keep us for Himself forever. We may not know what tomorrow will bring, but hope tells us there will always be a tomorrow in God’s loving hands. Easter hope offers us the courage to let go of our Linus blankets and trust today to the God of today and of our tomorrows. Today, this Easter, venture to ask God to roll away the huge stone that sits against whatever dark and silent tomb that imprisons our lives. Venture the courage to ask him to unwrap the linen that enfolds us in whatever robs of life. We may just find the stone rolled aside and the linens in a heap. We may just discover that light and freedom and energy for today really exists.

Our Lord tells us; *“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life...Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”* Our value today, or freedom today, our circumstances today rests fully on the God who loves us today, tomorrow, and forever.

The third way Easter intrudes in our lives is that it grants us hope for tomorrow. Easter hope gives us the energy to exercise our God-given gift to dream and plan for tomorrow. *The hope of an eternal tomorrow and bodily resurrection from death gives us the energy to look forward to the future.* We can dream, create, and give back what God daily gives us because we are on His eternal time schedule, not our temporary one. When our eternal tomorrow belongs to God, great dreams and plans will naturally follow.

It is the resurrection that walks us into the future. It is the bodily resurrection of the dead that draws the line in the sand between our Christian faith and any other world religion. The implications are enormous. When we talk about resurrection of the body we do not mean immortality of the soul. The bodily resurrection of the dead means that we have a body that is just as real, just as tangible, just as definable as this earthly body, except that it is called a spiritual body that lives forever.

Why is this distinction so important? Because who we are and what we do in time carries forward into who we are and what we do in eternity. Our souls do not just merge with some great amorphous Oneness in the afterlife. We do not lose our individuality or our personality. Quite the contrary. Our individual lives are given new bodies that live forever. Likewise, who we are in eternity with God reaches back into time to mold our present lives into the future of Christ -likeness.

There is an interesting story told of Dwight. L. Moody, the famous evangelist. As a young minister, he was unexpectedly called upon to preach a funeral sermon. He hunted through all four Gospels desperately trying to find one of Jesus' funeral sermons, but his search was in vain. He found that Christ broke up every funeral he attended. Death could not exist where he was. When the dead heard his voice they sprang to life. Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection and the life."* Resurrection of the body and life in this body go hand in hand. They are both found in the one person Jesus, the Christ.

We can plan and dream, create and work for tomorrow because our tomorrows never end. Death cannot exist where Jesus is, and our lives are strongly held in His care. That is the guarantee of the resurrection. The seal of guarantee is the indwelling Holy Spirit given to each believer. Death will not stick where hope abides, and hope abides in the one who was bodily raised from the death to lead those of us who follow.

I leave you with a poem called **"Full Coverage."** It goes like this:

*I have an insurance policy
Written in the blood of the Lamb,
Sealed by the cross of Jesus,
Redeemable wherever I am!*

*The company will never go bankrupt,
It is bonded by God's promise true;*

*It will keep every word of its contract,
Exactly what it says it will do.*

*I don't have to die to collect it,
No premiums do I have to pay;
All I do is to keep God's promise
And walk in His holy way.*

*No collector will ever come calling,
It was paid on Calvary's tree;
It insures me for living and dying
And for all eternity.*

“For God has said, ‘I will never, never fail you or forsake you.’” Release the past, enjoy today, and plan for tomorrow. Hope in God. He loves you and that never changes. Happy Easter!