

Dear Disciples of the Risen Lord,

On Easter Sunday in many of our churches the organ belts out the hymn “*Christ the Lord is Risen Today.*” People smile and sing loudly. It may feel to some people like we have one foot in heaven. Isn’t heaven a place of joyful singing and smiles? Easter is a very happy day as the church gathers.

There is a problem. It is Monday. We leave church with Easter joy in our hearts, we believe it is a lasting joy. Monday hits hard. The bills are due. Some of us have to fight the traffic getting kids off to school and/or making our way to work. Some of us fight the traffic to get to an early lab or doctor appointment.

Difficult will also be the persecution. Some people take exception to our gathering to worship Jesus as the only Son of God and the Risen Savior. That fact that we seek out Jesus for forgiveness of our sins will bother them. It will suggest that they too should deal with their sins. But they don’t want anybody reminding them of their awful transgressions. They don’t believe a shameful death on a cross will make things better. So they persecute Christians in the media. They talk against Christian faith. If they know you, they are not afraid to persecute you.

The Christians in Asia Minor, modern day, Turkey could identify with this. They loved Easter, but they were facing troubles including persecution. Never-the-less, St. Peter writes to them in verse 3, “**Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!**” The Apostle knew that it is not easy being a Christian. He himself had faced rough persecution at the hands of his people, the Jews. Yet he is praising God.

As we come out of Easter we should not stop praising God. Why? Peter tells us that **Easter Gives Us a Living Hope!** Because of this Living Hope in Jesus we cannot only survive life’s troubles, but we can thrive. Let’s dig in and see what the Apostle is saying.

### **1. Hope lives with an inheritance.**

Hope is common to all of us as it was 500 years ago, when Martin Luther lived. He wrote, “*Everything done in the world is done by hope. No farmer would sow one grain of corn if he did not hope it would grow up and become seed...no merchant or tradesman would see himself work if he did not hope to*

*reap benefit thereby...*” This is true of us. We work with the hope of receiving a paycheck. We go to the store in hopes of find food, to the doctor in hopes of finding a cure.

Christians hope, but there is a difference. We have a hope that lives and is certain because of the inheritance Christ won for us.

A. The Apostle Peter explains this Living Hope.

1. **“In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,...” (3b)** As we hear the Gospel reading today we may wonder how the Apostle Thomas could be so dense and not believe the news of Jesus’ resurrection. We have to remember that Thomas is simply speaking a point of view that comes from the world in which we live. From the moment you are born in this world there is sadness brought on by sin. We are all walking down the road that eventually leads to the cemetery. The world’s view is that once you’re resting in the cemetery, you are not coming out. Without factoring in the Gospel, the only thing we could add is that all humans, you and me, would be resting under God’s condemnation. Without a reboot or rebirth in our relationship with God, our sin causes us to be condemned for all eternity.

So the Apostle tells us that God in his mercy, his undeserved love, gave us a new birth. St. Peter points to Jesus death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. Jesus took God’s condemnation on the cross so we would not be condemned. He rose from the dead to show that in him we rest in God’s grace and forgiveness. We have been given hope. Jesus is our Living Hope.

2. St. Peter says that we have an inheritance that **“can never perish, spoil or fade.”** An inheritance is a gift given by parents to those who survive them, usually their children. We have been given a gift by God. We have forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus. That gift to us can never perish.

B. Unfortunately these Christians, the Apostle was writing to, were coming under attack from anti-Christian forces. There was pressure to leave the church and abandon their faith. Would they end up losing their spiritual and eternal inheritance?

St. Peter writes, **“This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” (4b, 5)** Eternal life in heaven is securely held for us. We are also protected. The Lord protects our faith through Word and Sacrament. In the Word he shows us the lies of Satan. Satan is defeated. He will not win. In the Word he tells us of his

great love for us. In the Sacraments he shows us his love and commitment to our salvation. He will cause us to stand firm until Jesus' returns for us. The Apostle Paul give us this comfort in Romans 8, "[**Nothing**] will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (39)

## 2. Hope lives through trials.

Years ago a young man quit studying for the ministry. When someone asked "Why?", the response was that, "*He was disappointed that the Bible College was not heaven on earth.*" I can tell you that especially in the fall semester there are young men who are weeded out because they are not ministry material. They may be very worldly in there talk and attitude. Even among those who are good candidates for ministry there are generally rough edges that have to be smoothed out over the years as they train to be pastors and teachers. Christians may be under the impression that once they join the church, they will enjoy "*heaven on earth.*" St. Peter tells them that there will be trials, but he also indicates that they still have a Living Hope.

A. He writes, "**In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.**" The Christians of that time suffered at the hands of Jewish people who believed the Christians were opposed to Moses. This was not true. A greater and much harsher persecution was coming and may have already begun at the hands of the Roman Empire. The Emperor Nero personally saw to the deaths of thousands of Christians.

St. Peter emphasizes two facts. They still had great joy. Salvation in Jesus means we are blessed by God now and forever. He will watch over us and help us. He will take us to heaven in the end. No one can take that away. The Apostle also states very deliberately that this suffering is "**for a little while.**" He means that the suffering that we go through will not last. Even if it would go on for forty years, that will seem short compared to an eternity of God's blessings. The bad we go through here really is a "*drop in the bucket*" compared to an eternity of God's goodness.

Why does God allow this? The Apostle has an explanation in verse 7.

B. "**These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire— may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.**"

People love pure gold, not gold with all kinds of impurities. It makes it less valuable. Workers smelt it at 1100 degrees Fahrenheit. It burns off the impurities and makes it more precious.

Trials, for the Christian, have a way of taking our eyes off the things of this world and getting us to focus on the Word of God where we see Jesus and his grace. This causes our faith to be purified and strengthened. This helps us to stand firm and to be ready when Jesus comes to call us home to himself.

### **3. Hope lives expressed in faith.**

Years ago when I was in Algoma, Wisconsin, I met an extraordinary woman. She had been in a terrible car accident and lived in constant pain as a result. She took up the hobby of oil painting. The day I visited her she had taken a Christmas Nativity scene and was transferring it to a large canvas with deliberate brush strokes. She was keeping busy helping with her daughter's upcoming wedding. I wondered. How was it that she wasn't curled up in bed in a dark room nor was she muttering a word of complaint. She pointed to Jesus in the painting. Peace in Jesus was her focus. The joy he gave her moved her to stay productive. A positive attitude and life despite searing pain.

St. Peter tells us, **“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,...”** (8) After Easter there is pain, struggles and even persecution. But we have an inexpressible joy which naturally shows in the way we live. Why? It is Jesus. He is our Living Hope. We do this because Peter says, **“you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”** (9) Just as God delivered Jesus from the grave so he will deliver us in the end. Sure hope gives us sure joy.

Conclusion: Praise God, dear friends! After Easter there is bad news in the world and in our lives. We have even better news. The news is the Good News that Jesus has risen! Hope lives! **Easter Gives Us a Living Hope.** So Peter says, **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”** Praise God, dear friends!” Amen.