

*Second Sunday Of Easter*

April 27, 2014

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

1 Peter 1:3-9

***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, 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. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 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, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (NIV)***

What gives you hope? Is it all the money you put away into the stock market? If so then you might have already learned the hard way how fickle such a market can be? Is it your health that gives you hope, the fact that you are feeling as fit as a fiddle? Then I'm sure you don't need me to give you an example of people who were feeling great one day and then suddenly everything changed. Is your hope tied up in your children? Even then so many hopes have been crushed and left people disappointed. So where, in what, or in whom do you place your hope?

The disciples on that very first Easter were a group who once had hope. Their hope was tied up in someone. Do you remember the sad and heart wrenching words of those two disciples on the road to Emmaus? They remarked concerning Jesus ***"we had hoped that he was going to redeem Israel."*** (Luke 24). But to them that hope was dead. So too the disciples had hoped Jesus was the Messiah, their Lord and Master who would never leave them or forsake them. But all that was before they witnessed Jesus suffer, before they saw Jesus crucified, and before they saw Jesus die. Now their hopes were all buried with Jesus in the tomb. Where was their hope now as they gathered together full of doubt and filled with fear as they hid behind locked doors? I wonder if Peter started to repeat those words he once said to Jesus, ***"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*** (Matthew 19)

What a different tune Easter soon had Peter singing! ***"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."*** What a different tune a living Jesus has Thomas singing! He went from doubting & declaring, ***"Unless I see...I will not believe it"*** to confessing, ***"My Lord and my God!"*** (John 20) What a difference Easter made in the lives of these disciples! What a difference it makes to us! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Celebrate again today what Easter has done. Rejoice in what Jesus rising from the dead means. Remember today and every day what you and I now have for: **We have a living hope!**

There are a few things I want us to understand about our living hope. This hope is not like a hope that it doesn't rain and ruin my chance to golf later today. It is nothing like telling someone: ***"I hope all your dreams come true."*** This hope is sure; it is certain. We

have a living hope – one that is ours now guaranteed. It is already ours – it only remains a hope because it is waiting for us. It is guaranteed for us through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and it is waiting for us in heaven.

Listen again to what Peter writes: ***“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.”*** Do you understand what God’s great mercy has given to us and what Jesus’ resurrection did for us? We have a living hope! We have been given an inheritance. This inheritance is kept for us in heaven. Did you notice why it is far more awesome than anything we could ever receive here on earth? Peter describes it as an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. Can you imagine that?

Kids, think back to the things you hoped for before Christmas. Go back to the excitement of that morning as you opened up your gifts. Now honestly answer this question. How many of those gifts are you still excited about just a few months later? How many things have you already tossed aside? Isn’t the same true with the adults here? The shine quickly fades away from the new car, or new dress, or new toy. Things here on earth always seem to ***“perish, spoil or fade.”*** But not with your inheritance in heaven! It will never get old. It will always be exciting and new. I think way too many pictures misrepresent heaven. You have these scenes of people floating around playing their harp all day. But heaven is going to be a place where you will never be bored, a place with one joy after another, a place filled with more happiness and pleasures than we could ever dream up.

This is our living hope. This hope is one that will never die because Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Thank the Lord that we are people ***“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.”*** God doesn’t just give us this living hope, God also guards this living hope. God keeps us strong through His Word and Sacraments. It is no surprise then that Peter writes, ***“in this you greatly rejoice.”*** Isn’t this a big reason we come to church every week? We come to thank and praise God. We are here to rejoice and give God the glory for our living hope. What does it say about our understanding about this gift if we don’t rejoice? What does it say about our appreciation for such a living hope if we don’t want to worship God? No, in this ***“you greatly rejoice.”***

We greatly rejoice because we have a living hope. Yet, this doesn’t mean life is going to be all peaches and cream. In fact, Peter tells us ***“now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”*** Peter writes to Christians scattered throughout the world who knew something about suffering grief in all kinds of trials. Have you heard of the Roman ruler by the name of Nero? He was the guy running the show at this time and he loved to persecute followers of Jesus. He was ruthless. All you really need to know about Nero is he would cover Christians in pitch, oil, or resin, nail them to posts, and have them lighted and burned as torches for his gardens.

We might not be facing such a severe threat of persecution, but we too have our own trials. How have you suffered lately? For sure suffering will come in this sinful world. Does it fill us with doubt? Does it fill us with fear? Do our worries and doubts and fears and sins at times get the better of us? They do. We do not always show that we have a living hope. Yet, it is for those doubts and those fears too that Jesus died. It is those sins too that His blood has washed away. We have a living hope just as sure as we have a living Savior.

There will be times we suffer, when we do not understand the reason for certain things

happening to us, when we want to turn to God and cry out “why?” At those times just know that God considers your faith more valuable than gold – all the gold in the world. In a way God answers us right here when we ask why we suffer. ***“These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”*** God allows our faith to go through the refiners’ fire so that we hold onto our living hope. God is working things out for our eternal good so we keep our eyes on what truly matters. Troubles and trials have a way of turning us back to God and keep us relying on His grace.

So where, in what, or in whom do you place your hope? I pray your hope is tied up in that same someone the disciples of that first Easter had pinned their hopes on. Can you even imagine being there with them when Jesus enters the room and says ***“Peace...Peace be with you?”*** Good-bye doubt! So long fear! Welcome peace and joy – peace of sins forgiven and guilt forgotten – joy that the Savior lives and will truly never leave them or forsake them! They had now a living hope! So do we, for we too have a living Savior. I pray Easter, on good days and bad, has us singing a much different tune. Now, not even death can stop our living hope as Paul writes: ***“If only for this life we have hope in Christ we are to be pitied more than all men” (1 Corinthians 15).*** But Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! ***“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, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”*** Amen.