

1 Peter 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

A man lies motionless in his hospital bed. A terrible accident has brought him to the edge of death. The doctors say that he has almost no chance of survival. His wife is in the room with him. She holds his hand. She knows that doctors have been wrong before. She believes that nothing is impossible with God. As she talks to him, she feels his hand squeezing hers. Where there is life, there is hope.

A person is flirting with a dangerous sin. He has fallen before. He could fall again. There are days when he just wants to give up. But then he remembers that Jesus died to take away his sins. And then he remembers that God will give him the strength he needs to fight temptation. He understands that his inner spiritual struggle is actually a sign that the Holy Spirit is living in him. And where there is life, there is hope.

In and around the city of Jerusalem, people were trying to understand everything that had taken place. Darkness covered the land in the middle of the day. The massive temple curtain had been torn in two. Witnesses had seen Joseph and Nicodemus bury the body of Jesus and roll the stone in front of the tomb just before sunset.

But then there was an earthquake. And somehow the massive stone had been moved from the grave's entrance. Some people went to see for themselves what had happened. Among them was Peter, who wrote the words we will consider this morning. Peter ran to the tomb and saw that it was open. He went into the tomb and saw that it was empty. That could only mean one thing. Jesus was alive! And where there is life, there is hope. And as we consider life and hope this morning, by faith, please...

Sometimes Christians can be affected by what we might call Easter jetlag. For weeks

we anticipate Jesus' resurrection. And when that day finally comes, we rejoice! We celebrate the occasion with triumphant hymns and beautiful decorations and family gatherings. And then it's over. In the days after Easter there can be a letdown. Statistically, it can show up in the number of people who attend worship. Physiologically and mentally, it can show up in the collective and exhalative whoosh expressed by many. Even emotionally it can show up in the way people feel.

But if the words of our text give us any indication, post-Easter jetlag did not appear to have an effect on Peter. Even though years had gone by since the first Easter, the very thought of the empty tomb still filled his heart with joy. Again: ***“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.***

As we begin our Growth Group Series, it is important to recognize that life and hope go together. In fact, the main thrust of the theme is that “living” (as in ***living hope***) is not just an adjective. It's also a verb. That means that over the next weeks we'll be looking at what it means not just to have hope that is living but also to live your hope. Now that may seem kind of confusing, so let's dig into it a little further.

Again, ***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.*** So certain is your heavenly Father of your status as his children, that he has your inheritance waiting for you in heaven, with your name on it. In fact, he has marked you with his name here on earth in order to mark his eternal home with your name on it in heaven. And it all happens through this ***new birth into living hope*** that Peter describes.

It is no coincidence that Peter connects the resurrection to life of Jesus with the new birth God gives to you and me. These words bring to mind the conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus, the same Nicodemus who

buried Jesus. The Lord told him: **No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.** (John 3:3) Jesus wasn't talking about a physical rebirth. Jesus wasn't referring to a second birth from a mother's womb. Jesus was calling for a spiritual rebirth. This rebirth, or as Peter puts it, this "**new birth,**" comes through God's Word and sacraments, in other words, the means of grace. God touches hearts through his Word. The Holy Spirit miraculously creates faith through water connected with the same Word in baptism. And he assures you and me of our blood-bought forgiveness and our paid-for perfection through bread and wine connected with the same Word in Holy Communion with Jesus' very body and blood.

But it all would be meaningless and God's Word would be powerless without the resurrection - every promise would be broken. If Christ has not been raised, our faith is pointless. If Christ is still buried in the tomb, then we are as good as dead. Without life, there is no hope.

But because Jesus has been raised, everything is different. God has given us **new birth into a living hope.** We live our hope because our Savior lives. And nothing can change that. Where there is life, there is hope. And this hope that we live can **never perish, spoil, or fade.** And the reason, is because this hope of ours is not kept on sinful earth. No, it is **kept in heaven for you.**

Only it isn't just **being kept for you.** No, just as important is that you are being kept for it. Peter explains, **[You] through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.** You see, this promise that Peter is proclaiming - this **new birth,** this **hope,** this **inheritance** - it is all yours **through faith.** Faith is the conduit, the pipe, the wire, the connection between you and God's power, a power that fills you, shields you, strengthens you, emboldens you to live this hope that has been gifted to you.

That's why living hope by faith - in other words, being a Christian - isn't like putting "organ donor" on your driver's license. You know, where it's just a stamp on a card and doesn't mean anything until you die. I think

sometimes we live that way, though. OK, I have my Christian Card with the eternal life stamp, so I should be good to go. As long as I show up most Sundays for worship and throw a few bucks in the offering plate, I should be good to go whenever my last day comes. I'm going to keep my Christian Card in my wallet, though to keep it safe. I wouldn't want to pull it out for others to see. After all, they might get the wrong idea about me. Or I might lose it. Then again, its buried deep inside...and it would take some digging around to find it...

No, being a Christian, living hope by faith, means valuing your Christian Card and its eternal life sticker above all else. Living your hope by faith means finding joy in having a Christian card in your possession. Living your hope by faith means pulling out that Christian Card at every opportunity. It means living your hope by faith every day, come what may. Peter describes it, ***In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ 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.***

You see, there's work being done even now in you, a refining that takes place as you live your resurrection hope by faith in the full knowledge of what is being accomplished in you now in anticipation of what is to come for you then through Jesus. ***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, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.***

There is a saying that goes: "Life without Christ is a hopeless end. Life with Christ is an endless hope." I don't know who wrote those words, but they really help us put **living hope** into perspective. For the Christian, Easter can be summed up in two words: Jesus lives! And where there is life, there is hope. So get living! Amen.