

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer
Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
4/23/2017, Easter 2A
1 Peter 1:1-9, John 20:19-31

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My subject for this morning's sermon is Easter hope. My text is from our Epistle Reading, from 1 Peter 1. You will notice Saint Peter speaks of hope in this text:

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
By his great mercy we have been born anew to *a living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... (1 Peter 1:3, RSV)

Earlier this week a reporter from WNBC New York visited me at my Pastor's booth out there on the sidewalk at 88th Street and Lexington Avenue.¹ She seemed particularly interested in a phrase I used when talking about Easter Sunday, just last Sunday. I had been saying that I consider the resurrection of Jesus to be the hinge of history, resulting in a burst of hope on earth. She seemed to like that phrase, "a burst of hope on earth." That's because we need some hope, now don't we? Maybe not all the time. Maybe we happen to be enjoying a good stretch in life – a good season of spiritual refreshment. Maybe we do not much think about hope, because things are going along well. Maybe we see the Pastor's booth, for example, and are glad that it is there for other people, but at this particular time in life, we do not need it for ourselves. If so, then great! God bless you. But for many people, things are not going so well and they could use a good burst of hope on earth.

So, I want to discuss Easter hope. I want to discuss it under three headings. First, I want to lift up the apostle – the one who speaks so cheerfully of hope. The Bible would have us understand that this is Saint Peter who is talking to us. It interests me that Peter should speak of hope. Second, I want to draw attention to the people to whom Peter is writing. They live in towns and provinces throughout modern-day Turkey. Back then, it was called Asia Minor. Peter thinks that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead gives these folks a new and living hope – something they did not have before. And finally, I want to speak of our good reason for hope. That is, I want to speak of Jesus. That is what I try to do at my Pastor's booth: I try to give encouragement to

¹ <http://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/Local-Pastor-Offers-Wise-Words-and-Prayers-at-Five-Cent-Prayer-Booth-419856204.html>

folks not in any willy-nilly way, but by speak of Jesus. That's what I try to do in this pulpit and in my pastor's study and when I hear private confessions. I try to encourage people in a particular way: that is, by speaking of Jesus. So, those three headings: the apostle Peter, the new Christians of Asia Minor, and the great cause of hope on earth, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Let's begin by speaking of Peter. Last we saw of the man, he was not doing well. He was miserable. On Palm Sunday, Peter did not shine in the story of the Passion of our Lord. Jesus had forewarned Peter that Peter would deny him. Peter would not hear of it, and yet he denied his Lord anyway. Then he wept. St. Matthew puts it this way:

And immediately the cock crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:75, RSV)

Sometimes we weep with joy, as at a wedding. Sometimes we weep with gratitude, at the memory of loved ones, for example. But these tears of Peter were not of that warm sort. They were bitter tears. They were tears bordering on despair. They were tears that wondered whether life could ever be good again.

If ever you should find yourself weeping such bitter tears, remember Peter. Remember how his happiness one day returned to him. Remember how he could write to the Christians in Asia Minor and speak to them of hope:

By [God's] great mercy we have been born anew to a *living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

When you are caught in the middle of bitter weeping, it is hard to imagine that the sun will shine again. It is hard to remember the words of the Psalmist:

...weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. (Psalm 30:5, KJV)

Especially you young ones in the congregation, when you are weeping, you are tempted to think that your troubles are the end of the world. But they are not. They are not because Jesus lives, world without end, Amen! I try not to give hope to people in an unauthorized fashion. I try to give them *real* hope —

hope that rests on nothing less than Jesus and his righteousness.² I try to give hope as Peter did long before me, by speaking of Jesus.

And so, if the gloom should ever feel endless to you, if the fog should ever seem ceaseless, if the dawn feels as if it shall not arrive again, then remember Jesus. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, Peter could not have been reconciled to him. Peter could not have poured out his heart to the One he had denied. Peter could not have said, “Lord, you know that I love you” (John 21:15). If Jesus had not risen from the dead, then Peter could not have been launched on his ministry as apostle. He could not have heard Jesus say to him, “Feed my lambs.” But Jesus *is* risen. And Jesus is risen “with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2) Easter means that there is Someone afoot in our world who can and is determined to make things better. Easter means hope for you.

Second, let me speak briefly of the people to whom Peter writes. They live in the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Scholars debate whether they are Jews or Gentiles, but let us imagine that we do not need to entirely settle that question. Let’s figure that these new converts are both. Some are Jews, some are Gentiles. Either way, St. Peter says that he has some *new* hope for them. In fact, he says that they have been “born anew”:

we have been *born anew* to a living hope...

For Peter, Easter means something so radically differently, it is like being born again to hope.

I simply want to observe that these folks in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and so forth no doubt already had hope. Their old religions gave them hope. Or their old philosophies, or their old theories, had comforted them and helped them to hang in there. And thank God that they did hang in there. But now Peter comes along with a new kind of hope. He has more confidence in this hope. He is thrilled by this hope. It is a hope that is based on the living Jesus, whom Peter loves.³

We human beings are capable of placing our hopes in all kinds of things – in our youth, our strength, our good looks, our wealth, our heritage, our theories. But Peter comes along and says to everyone: This world is better than you might have thought, for you have a hope that is strong and will not

² LBW 294, *My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less*

³ My wife, Carol, and I had a kind of grandfather-in-the-Lord who was a missionary to Africa. In his journal about those days, he talked about what a joy and liberation it was to preach Jesus to native people for the first time, for those people lived in a hard mixture of hope and fear inspired by the spirit world of their ancestors. When they heard of Jesus, it gave them a new and living hope.

fail you. Indeed you have reason for hope that is based on a Man who has conquered death! Nothing is going to stop him and his good plans. All other grounds of hope are sinking sand. Youth, beauty, strength, wealth, even our theories can fade. But Jesus is living and eternal. So, we have some good hopes indeed!

This discussion of the new kind of hope of which Peter speaks leads me to my third heading: The content of our hope. We do not hope aimlessly. We hope in the risen Jesus Christ.

Take every good story you have ever heard about Jesus, and as you come forward to the Holy Communion this morning, apply that story to yourself. Reckon with the mighty thought that *here and now* you are coming into the real presence of that good One – the One who calmed the storm on the sea, the One who healed the blind man, the one who forgave the woman caught in adultery. Think of this morning’s story about Jesus – how he says to Thomas words that ring with glory for you and me too:

²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”
(John 20:28, RSV)

This is what our Christian hope is about: we get to place our trust in the One who looks ahead, past Thomas, through the centuries, across the oceans, all the way to our little church and says to you and me: Blessed are *you*, for you have not seen me, yet you believe.” Jesus is the One who is risen in such a way that he can make his blessing come true: Blessed are you, for you have not yet seen Jesus, yet you will, and you will be a happy person then.

Jesus is the content, reason, foundation, and sure defense of our hope in life. Never give up, never think you are too small to have any good hopes, never think that you are overlooked, for Jesus lives, and he keeps his eye even on the sparrow, even on you and me. And to him belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.