

Joshua Willadsen
The Second Sunday of Easter
Sermons
May 1, 2011

1 PETER 1:3-12 - "A LIVING HOPE"

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Hope may be defined as a feeling of expectation and a desire for a certain thing to happen. Hope is a preferred and desirable outcome. Hope has a favorable end and goal in mind. Hope wants the best in the future.

We commonly use the word "hope" to describe things we defiantly want to happen, but which may or may not happen. Hope in this manner is uncertain, not guaranteed. For example, NFL fans hope that the current dispute between NFL owners and players is resolved soon, so that we can enjoy the 2011 NFL season. NFL fans want there to be a season, but there is a sad possibility that the 2011 season may not happen or not in its fullness. Likewise as a Green Bay Packer fan, I hope that the Packers repeat as Super Bowl Champions in 2011. But all my wanting, willing, and cheering cannot guarantee Super Bowl victory; there is some uncertainty in my desired outcome (sadly the odds are against repeating as Super Bowl Champions). "Hope" is what we want to happen, but may not.

Holy Scripture predominantly uses the word "hope" in a significantly different way. "Hope" in the Scriptures is certain. The word "hope" and its cognates are normally used in reference to promises that God has made to His people. There is certainty in this kind of "hope" because God, who created the heavens and the earth, is able to do whatever He says, whatever He promises. The future, the end, the goal of all things is in God's hands because He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. God's will and purposes shall be.

"Hope" in the biblical sense not only differs in respect to the certainty of the outcome, but also in regard to the desired outcome. Scriptural "hope" is not just good, but the very best future for us, because of God's grace and mercy. The God of creation is the God of our redemption; He is the God, who redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt with a mighty hand according to His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has defeated all evil, redeemed the world from sin, and crushed the head of the serpent through Christ Jesus, the promised seed of the woman.

Through Jesus Christ, who ransomed us not with gold or silver, but with His own precious blood on the cross, and who was raised on the third day to resurrection life, God has given hope to those who had none; in Christ God promises the very best future for you, a certain future. According to God's great mercy in Christ God promises an end

to your struggle with sin, an end to the temptations of the devil, an end to the sufferings of this present evil age, and an end to death itself. In Christ God promises you the resurrection of your bodies in the last time, in the day of Christ Jesus yet to be revealed.

This is the hope, the Christian hope, a living hope, that St. Peter writes about in his first pastoral letter to the elect exiles, the chosen strangers, the baptized sojourners, who are wandering in a world that is not their home and struggling to live, fighting enemies from outside and within. St. Peter praises God for the certain and best future in Christ and encourages the baptized to daily live in light of the living hope promised in Christ. He writes:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy caused us be born again into a hope, which is living, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 into an immortal and undefiled and unfading inheritance which has been and is being kept for us in heaven 5 who are being kept by the power of God through faith for the prepared salvation to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though for a little while it is necessary to be grieved by various trials, 7 in order that your tested faith- which is more precious than gold, that is perishing, - which is being tested by fire, might be found for praise and glory and honor in the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Whom even though you have not seen you love, in Whom presently you do not see but you are believing and rejoice with unspeakable joy and filled with glory 9 by obtaining the completion of your faith, the salvation of your lives. 10 Concerning this salvation the prophets sought for earnestly and inquired carefully they prophesied concerning the grace for you, 11 by inquiring into what person or what time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when He had witnessed before hand concerning the sufferings of Christ and the glories after these things. 12 To whom it was revealed that not for themselves but for you they were serving, which things now were announced to you through those who proclaimed the good news to you by the Holy Spirit who was sent from heaven, into which things angels desire to look into.

These words of St. Peter were written for your benefit also, for just like those baptized in Christ in the first century were exiles, strangers, and sojourners, so too are you who have been baptized into Christ. God has caused you to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; a blessed and prepared inheritance is awaiting you in the future. This makes you an exile, stranger, and sojourner in this world. But just like the Christians before us, now we too must wait for our hope to be fulfilled.

Waiting for most things is difficult, but waiting for the fulfillment of our living hope in Christ at times seems unbearable. The present trials, temptations, and sufferings that we are grieved by in the present seem overwhelming and unending. Sin in the world, the sin of others, and our own sinfulness seem to always get the better of us.

Earthquakes, tsunamis, heavy rains, and tornados are causing death and destruction. Oppression, violence, and war fill the earth. Theft, kidnapping, rape, and murder happen in our own communities. When will it finally all end? Can't it all just be done now?

When is the economy going to get better? When are our leaders in government going to stop spending money we don't have? When will I get a good job?

When is our congregation going to grow? Why is it taking so long? What needs to be done?

When will I think before I speak? When will I do for others with no expectation of anything in return? When will I get my life in order?

When will the desires of my sinful flesh cease to lead me into trouble? When will I be able to do the good that I intend and avoid the evil I don't want to do? When will evil be gone? How long till all things are right?

In the face of these present trials, temptations, and sufferings the pessimist gives up, because he believes nothing will ever change for the better. Escaping the present evil reality of life in some way seems the best way for a pessimist to deal with things. The pessimist can busy and fill his or her life with anything, work or drugs, sex or TV, shopping or food in order to avoid facing these grave problems. But the optimist doesn't fare any better. He or she thinks that there is an easy solution to these problems, nothing that a little bit of time, careful planning, and good old fashioned work can't overcome. As a consequence the optimist gets busy doing a lot of stuff too, one idealistic cause after another until he has worn himself and his loved ones out.

In the mist of the present evils of this age, in the midst of trials, temptations, and sufferings God calls you to be hopeful, neither pessimistic nor optimistic. God in His great mercy has caused you to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ; God has already acted in Christ Jesus to deal with this present evil age. God has defeated sin, death, and devil for you. God has promised you a certain and optimal future, which is presently being kept for you heaven, but which you shall inherit in full when Christ returns to raise your dead bodies to resurrection life. In the midst of our present trials that shall last for a short while in comparison to our eternal hope to come we must keep God's gracious promises of salvation for us through Christ in mind and let these promises transform our thinking and acting.

Can Christians stop earthquakes, tsunamis, heavy rains, and tornados? Can Christians stop oppression, violence, and war throughout the earth? Can Christians end all theft, kidnapping, rape, and murder? No we cannot. But we can be prepared to help those who suffer these things; we can look out for our neighbors and guard their lives. We can get our own financial houses in order and hold our leaders accountable by calling attention the issues and voting.

We cannot grow the congregation, that is the work of the Holy Spirit through the good news proclaimed. But we can share the hope that we have in Christ Jesus with others; we can serve others in love; we can invite people to join us in Worship; and we can pray that God in His great mercy will call others into our living hope in Christ.

We can form good habits of discipline and self-control that will help us to get our lives in order, think before speaking, and put the needs of others before our own. But we will not be able to eradicate all mistakes, selfishness, and sin. At times we will do

the good that we want to and then we shall fail. At times we will avoid evil and then suddenly we will find ourselves doing it.

Yet in all these times we can hold fast to God's Word and promises to us in Christ Jesus! God has redeemed you through the precious blood of Jesus and today grants you the forgiveness of all your sins. God has called you to faith in Christ through the good news and caused you to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A blessed inheritance is being kept for you in heaven ready to be given you in the day of salvation, on the last day when Christ Jesus shall return and raise your dead body to resurrection life. On that day all things shall be made new. Trials, temptations, and sufferings shall cease. Sin, death, and the devil shall be done. On that day we shall see Him whom we love and be comforted by His presence. Now we trust in God's promises in Christ, now we rejoice in the living hope God has given us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, Amen.