

**Second Sunday of Easter – April 23, 2017**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**  
*Pastor Charles Heup*

**1 Peter 1:3-9 (NIV)**

**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, 4) and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, 5) 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. 6) 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. 8) 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.**

Dear Friends in Christ:

I'm sure that many of our children enjoyed finding their Easter Baskets last week. Gift Baskets have become popular year round gifts – with fruit and nuts and candy for people of all ages to enjoy. Our Epistle Lesson for today talks about the blessings that we enjoy because of Christ's resurrection. We could say

**Theme:** The Resurrection of Jesus Offers us a Basketful of Blessings

1. We have new life
2. We have an eternal inheritance waiting for us
3. We have a reason to rejoice even in tough times
4. We have salvation for our souls

Faith inspired praise is really the appropriate response to the basketful of blessings God has prepared for us with the resurrection of his Son Jesus. That's exactly how Peter began his letter to God's chosen people who had been called to faith in the Lord Jesus.

**Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!**

Peter continues by calling attention to some of the reasons we have to offer that praise. **In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.** Because of God's great mercy we have a new life. Born as sinners in a sinful world we were spiritually dead and without hope. Purely out of his own goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness on our part, the Lord has provided us with a new life filled with hope.

The Father sent his Son Jesus to take upon himself the punishment we deserved for our sins. That John Jesus was cursed by his Father and abandoned by him to hell on that Friday when he was crucified. He suffered, died, and was buried. But, that wasn't the end of the story – on Easter Sunday Jesus came back to life. He descended into to hell to proclaim his defeat of Satan. The power of sin, of death and even the devil had been broken.

In anticipation of his Easter victory Jesus had told Nicodemus that a person would need to be born again in order to see the kingdom of God. Jesus further explained that this re-birth would take place through the power of the Holy Spirit. (John 3:5) **Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.** Jesus had in mind the new life a person receives through Baptism. Peter makes that connection in the third chapter of his first Epistle: (1 Peter 3:21) **This water**

**symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

Easter and the resurrection of Christ stand behind our baptism to give assurance and meaning to the faith it creates. The resurrection gives us a sure and certain hope – the hope of life without sin, without death and without the Devil. We are born again in baptism – born with a restored image of God. We sometimes call this renewed image of God our “new man.” Our new man is guided by the Holy Spirit to fight the good fight of faith and to walk in the paths of righteousness. In this life time our old man – our sinful flesh still clings to us. He goes along with us wherever we go – trying to regain the control of our lives. His screaming and protesting may distract us at times. Occasionally we may let our guard down and he’ll take the upper hand. But God’s power is there to protect and preserve us. The Holy Spirit will use his Word and his Sacraments to strengthen our faith so that we will be shielded from eternal harm. The Lord will preserve the hope he has provided by Christ’s resurrection.

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Together with the new life that we’ve discovered in the basketful of blessings made possible by Christ’s resurrection there is also an eternal inheritance waiting for us. This inheritance is part of our living hope. Most religions hold out hope to their followers – the hope of blessings for this life and perhaps even the hope of blessings in a life to come. But in each case the acquisition of those blessings hinges on whether or not the individual is able to do enough to earn them.

A number of years ago an 11 year girl died due to a diabetic coma when her parents failed to take her to a doctor for help. Instead they turned to a religious web site and relied on the power of prayer. According to reports the family was not a member of any church or religious group. Their hope was a false hope because it was not based on specific promise of God. It’s true that the Bible encourages us to call upon God in the day of trouble and promises that he will hear and answer. But God also expects us to use the means that he provides – in that case that God could have used the medical assistance which doctors could have provided. In one of the news reports of that story, the parents blamed themselves for what happened because they had not prayed hard enough or in the right way or with as many people as would have been necessary for their daughter to live. This tragedy points out the fact that any hope which depends on our activity will be an unsure hope.

Because of God’s promise and God’s activity the hope we have for an eternal inheritance is a sure and certain hope. It’s based on the resurrection of Christ. An anonymous saying proclaims: Life with Christ is an endless hope, without him a hopeless end.

On the last day, Christians will receive the inheritance Christ has prepared for us and is kept safe in heaven for us. The inheritances we receive from our parents or grandparents are subject to all kinds of uncertainty. The value of that inheritance will fluctuate. Maybe the inheritance they wanted to share with us will be eaten up by health care costs. Some of their personal items that they want us to have will wear out of fade. That’s the way it is for everything in this world. How wonderful that the inheritance Christ earned for us with his resurrection is safe in heaven sheltered from anything that could diminish its value. We can count on it being there for us for all eternity.

There’s another blessing in our basketful of resurrection blessings that flows from our eternal inheritance. We have a reason to rejoice even in tough times. **6) 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 (a better word would be tested) by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.**

In light of the new life and the eternal inheritance which is ours because of Christ's resurrection we truly have reason to rejoice. But as long as we are still waiting for our hope to become reality we will experience sorrow and grief. The Lord allows these trials and griefs to enter into our lives for our good. Peter explains that the grief we suffer in times of trial is like a the test which proves whether or not gold is genuine.

Peter personally knew the heartbreak of failing a test of his faith. But he also knew the sweetness of God's forgiveness and the certain hope of eternal joy in heaven. God promises us that nothing we are asked to endure will be too great for us. (1 Corinthians 10:13) **No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.**

Our faith is shown to be genuine by the way that we handle the burdens laid upon us. There are many ways in which the Christian differs from the unbeliever. One of the more obvious differences is in the way we handle adversity. What makes even the worst tragedy bearable is the fact that it is only temporary. The apostles Paul reminds us in (2 Corinthians 4:17-18) **For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18) So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.**

We rejoice in our sorrow with the confidence that the Lord will be with us to rescue and deliver us. God's promises bring us through the fire and our faith is shown to be genuine – it was not misplaced. God's love and support were there for us in our time of need and our praises and the praises of others give him honor and glory.

Our praises will ring out the most loudly on the day when the Lord returns on the day of the great resurrection to give us and all believers the blessings of eternal life and our the inheritance he has prepared for us. Until that time we continue to rejoice even though we have never seen Christ because

The Resurrection of Jesus Offers us a Basketful of Blessings

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It's true that we haven't seen Jesus in the same way that Peter saw him but we do believe in him. He has filled our hearts with joy that's impossible to describe. We are already enjoying the benefits of the rescue which he won for us. And for all that we love him because he loved us first. We were on the brink of becoming eternal fatalities when Jesus snatched us from disaster – by offering his life for ours.

We don't have to wait until we pass on to receive the benefits of Calvary. They belong to us already now. There are no more payments which need to be made for sin. Salvation is ours. We have been set free from sin, death and the devil. We are safe in the hands of our loving Lord. Together with the Psalmist you can say goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

The Lord is your shepherd he will take care of all or your needs, he will guide you and lead you and protect you in times of trouble. And all these blessings are guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ.

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Amen.