

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Easter 2
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Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
My hope is built on Christ's resurrection

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. ⁵ Through faith you are being protected by God's power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time.

⁶ Because of this you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials ⁷ so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet by believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

—1 Peter 1:3-9

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! This is the day the Lord has made! We will rejoice and be glad in it! And how can we *not* join in this marvelous, grand doxology—this hymn of praise—with Peter who, on that first Easter Sunday, breathlessly caught up to young John at the entrance of the empty tomb and without hesitation, bolted past his young friend to examine the evidence of our eternal salvation!

Peter wrote the words that are for our consideration today. This is a hymn of praise, a doxology. He wrote these words more than 30 years after that first Easter morning. Yet the freshness of the resurrection message transports the old preacher with all the vigor and optimism of a youth.

The Christians to whom Peter wrote this letter were undergoing a lot of things. The people were scattered throughout Asia Minor. They were living in a hostile society. They were facing persecution. So, how does Peter begin this letter? Does he start by addressing the persecution they are facing? Does he address the corrupt government under which the people were oppressed? Does he encourage them to remain strong in the face of all these difficulties?

Well, he eventually addresses all of that. But how does he begin? Where does he begin? He begins his letter with the keystone of the Christian faith: the account of Jesus' resurrection. He begins with that happy event on which the church stands or falls: that **“[Christ] was handed over to death because of our trespasses and was raised to life because of our justification”** (Romans 4:25). Peter does this to raise the Christians' sights from earth to heaven. Peter first spreads before them the long view that Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee that all who put their trust in him will rise to everlasting life on the Last Day. And so he begins.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” Peter wants to recount the wonderful blessings that are ours. How can we not say good things about our God? How can we not praise him? How can we not proclaim him? **Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Just look at what he gives to you because he is alive! Peter piles the blessings on top of each other. **“By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. Through faith you are being protected by God's power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time.”**

I admit that a sermon could be written on each phrase. Today we walk into the treasure-house of God's Word, and as we pick up this diamond of our Lord's resurrection, we look at every angle and marvel at its beauty for us. Everything that we lost in the fall into sin is restored by the resurrection of Christ from the dead! Everything is restored! So, our hope for everything in this life and in the life to come, **our hope is built on Christ's resurrection.** So, let us rejoice in as many blessings as we can in the time we have this morning.

God used Peter to write these words. Peter. He was in the courtyard of Caiaphas. He brought down horrible curses on himself. He denied he knew Jesus. He went out and wept bitterly. And he spent three days in the soul's black night of despair. That must have been the longest weekend of Peter's life. Peter had time to remember what he did. He remembered Jesus' look. And he couldn't do anything different. It was done. He didn't even get a chance to say he was sorry. They took Jesus and killed him.

But on that Easter morning, when Jesus walked into the locked room and proved he had broken death's iron shackles, all that Peter was pondering came into focus. The Lord had risen, just as he had told them!

And what did Jesus proclaim to Peter and the disciples? **"On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, 'Peace be with you!'"** (John 20:19). "Peace be with you!" Peter, you are forgiven. The Lord Jesus died for your sins of denial. The Lord Jesus rose from the dead guaranteeing that you are forgiven. No wonder why Peter starts out, **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."**

New birth! Under the cover of night, that is what our dear Lord Jesus told Nicodemus that we need. Because we are "flesh born of flesh," we have a gruesome, eternal birth defect. Like fallen Adam, we have no true fear of God, no true faith in God, and we can only desire what God hates. We come into this world stillborn, spiritually dead. We need life. We need rebirth. We didn't have a choice in our first birth, and we didn't have a choice in our second. This is a birth that is *given* to us from God. We didn't deserve it. But he gave it. He gave it to us in his great mercy.

"By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Christ died. He was innocent. He didn't sin. He hung on the cross between two criminals, but he was innocent. But he allowed that to happen because that's where we were. We were overcome by death, so he allowed himself to be overcome by death. Martin Luther put it this way: "Death took an innocent victim when it overcame Jesus. Therefore, death owed our Lord a tremendous debt that it could not pay."

And what did our Lord demand for that injustice? He demanded that you and I be set free from sin, death, and eternal hell. Jesus stormed the gates of hell and broke through the guards. He entered that prison-house and set us free. Because death could not hold Jesus, we are assured that our sins are forgiven, God's justice has been satisfied, and Christ's resurrection guarantees our resurrection to everlasting life. Jesus' resurrection guarantees that God has given us **"an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you."**

Isn't that a comfort? To Christians who were being persecuted and saw a corrupt government, isn't it a comfort to know that we have an inheritance like that?

Large earthly inheritances can be squandered, stolen, or lose their luster. Our Lord's resurrection gives us an estate that "moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." Nobody can take this inheritance from you. Why not?

Well, look at who is guarding it. The risen Lord Jesus Christ stands guard over your inheritance. Nobody can take it from you. Nobody can rob it from you. It is **"kept in heaven for you."**

Doesn't that put into perspective how we live our lives now? A familiar hymn says, **"I'm but a stranger here. Heaven is my home."** We are strangers in this world. Our home is to be with our Risen and Living Lord.

Jesus' resurrection lifts us from the petty earthbound goals. His resurrection lifts us beyond the things of this world. We put off the distractions of this life and embrace our high calling with pure actions, holy words, and chaste thoughts. In these ways we give witness to the world that our Lord's resurrection is broad enough, deep enough, and high enough to include them as well!

So, in the midst of persecution and difficulty, Peter encouraged his readers, **"Because of this you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."**

This glorious inheritance is hidden from the eyes of many because of the severe trials Christians must suffer. Since the world only counts wealth in those things that are seen, they cannot fathom why the resurrection of Jesus moves us to rejoice even in our afflictions.

Yet we are keenly aware that the sinful flesh inside of us will not stop until it can destroy our Spirit-given faith. In this way, it would rob us of our glorious inheritance. When afflictions strike, they take from us all the earthly props that most people look to as evidence that God loves them. Wealth is taken. Friends desert us. Health gives way to disease and old age. Finally, we are left with nothing but the Word and promise of the almighty God, which points us to the cross and empty tomb. There and there alone we find the everlasting arms of the Father, holding us up when all else fails us. That is why Christians can bless their crosses and afflictions. They say to their afflictions, "You meant to harm me, but you do me more good than you know. For you make me despair of earth and lift my eyes to heaven. You drive me to my Bible and to Christ. Nowhere else can I find irrefutable proof that God loves me!"

In that way, trials are like a refiner's furnace that burns away the dirt and base metals from gold. Our faith, like gold, is in no way diminished by a refiner's fire. Rather, the fire of affliction brings our faith to its purest and strongest form.

What a feast the apostle Peter spreads before us today! And with the irrepressible confidence of one who has tasted and seen the wealth of heavenly glory through the eyes of faith, he sweeps us up with the final words of the grand doxology: **"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet by believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."**

Thomas would not believe unless he put his hand in Jesus' side. But you believe. And therefore, you are blessed. For Jesus himself said, **"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"** (John 20:29). Therefore, we can say with confidence: **My hope is built on Christ's resurrection!** Amen.