

God's Word we'll consider today is our reading from First Peter. Let's begin with prayer: *Jesus, lead us on, till our rest is won – and although the way be cheerless, we will follow calm and fearless. Amen.*

There is something about strife... about suffering... about death... that seems to strike a crushing blow to our hope in this life. And there's no need to look outside this church to find it happening. Today... this very day there are members of this congregation... your fellow brothers and sisters... who are hurting.

There are kids who are wondering, "What now?" and "What could I have done?" as they stand helplessly by watching their parents fight... watching them divorce... watching their hope for a normal family life disappear.

There are many here who are fighting to hold on to hope as the cancer spreads... or as parts of their bodies fail them... and while many of them who I've spoken to are marvelous witnesses for their Lord... I know that they battle moments where all hope seems lost... where they're left with their sickness and nothing else... and the devil whispers, "What hope could you have? What kind of God would let this happen?"

And if strife and suffering challenge our hope in this life... death most certainly attacks our hope with everything it has. Some of you are in pain because of the heart attack, the car accident, the freak accident, the miscarriage that robbed you of your child, your spouse, your parents... took them from you way too soon... Yes, there's something about strife, about suffering and death that strikes a blow to our hopes in this life.

And for all of us... whether you've gone through painful things or not... whether you're in the middle of the storm of despair and the loss of hope that comes with it... or if you're simply watching others suffer and waiting for your own turn – which again... is coming – either way... you know what it is to lose hope... to wonder, "What is God doing with my life?"

We heard today how hope had been replaced with doubt and fear as Jesus' own disciples grieved over his death. Their great hope for their country... for themselves... for their future... had been put in the ground. Everything they'd looked forward to... everything they believed seemed to be gone... their hope dashed against the gravestone that had shut their Teacher in.

But when it came to life and hope Jesus had a surprise for his disciples on the first Easter... though it shouldn't have come as a surprise, he'd told them after all... yes, when those disciples sat gathered in fear and grief and hopelessness... the Risen Christ came and stood among them... he calmed their fears with his Word of "**peace**."

Peace with God was theirs through his cross... Peace in death through His empty grave... And in that instant life and hope came flooding back into the hearts of the men who thought they'd lost all hope. Even Thomas who'd join them the following week would utter the truth about Jesus we cling to as he confessed, "**My Lord and my God.**" (John 20:28)

But what about us? We didn't get to see the Risen Savior face to face... we didn't get the chance to touch him... to put our fingers in his nail-marked hands... his pierced side... How are we supposed to have our hope restored like those first disciples? Well... the apostle John, an eyewitness of the Risen Christ tells us... he says in our Gospel from today that the words of the apostles were "**written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**" (John 20:31)

Even Jesus himself after Thomas gave that beautiful confession of faith said, "**Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**" (John 20:29) And you know who Jesus was speaking about there, don't you? It was you. You have heard the good news that Jesus offers real life and hope... that he gives forgiveness and peace... and that none of this is dependent

on what you have done... what you will do... but rather on what he has done for you. You've heard this good news. And by the work of the Holy Spirit, you believe this good news.

And it is this good news... this gospel about Jesus Christ that the apostle Peter points to in our sermon text today as the reason we can truly have life and hope... even when our life seems to be falling apart... even when all hope seems lost. Peter says in the opening verses of this letter: **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, 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. (1 Peter 1:3-5)**

Do you see the life and hope that Peter points to here? He says we have a living hope because of our living Savior. We have a hope that is not some uncertain wish for the future, but an absolutely certain expectation of what is to come for us. This hope is alive because Christ is alive. This hope will never die because Christ will never die. And this hope cannot be taken from you by divorce or suffering or death in this life... no it is safely kept in heaven... waiting for you... and you will see this hope realized because God will shield you... protect you... uphold you until the day faith turns to sight.

And Peter goes on to explain that this is where we as Christians find our true joy and delight, even when this world seems to be filled with hopelessness. He writes: **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. (1 Peter 1:6-7)**

You see, Peter knew that this life would never offer the life... the real life and real hope that any of us long for. He knew that during our years this side of heaven we would suffer grief in all kinds of trials. We would suffer sickness, and injury, and broken relationships, and lost jobs and lost homes and lost hopes... but those hopes that are lost are only hopes for this life... our real hope, our certain hope of eternal life... eternal joy... this cannot be touched... and it is to this hope which is ours in Christ that our faith clings even as our faith is tested.

And please remember dear friends that when your faith is tested... when you are tried in the fires of this life God is not doing this to find out if you really love him. He already knows your heart... he knows you love him... after all he is the one who planted that love in your heart. No these trials are only meant to demonstrate the genuine nature of your faith to you. Like gold that is put in the fire your faith comes and is shown to be brilliant... pure and genuine... and you realize that despite the difficulties and evils of this life you were always His... and will be forever.

That's what Peter is describing in the final verses of our text when he says: **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, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 3:8-9)**

As you go through the trials of this life it is Jesus you love and trust and through faith in him you are filled with a joy that is hard to express to someone who doesn't know it. Those who don't believe can't understand how you can still love and honor your parents who have broken your home... how you can forgive your ex-husband or ex-wife... how you can still smile and return to God's house and God's Word even as the chemo treatments increase and the rehab seems to do no good... Yes, those without Christ will wonder at your hope in the face of death... your confidence in the midst of suffering... and God-willing this will provide you an opportunity **to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. (1 Peter 3:15)**

You have hope because of Christ. You have a life... a real, eternal, unending life in Christ that cannot be taken away by heartbreak, by suffering, by sickness, or even by death. You have the faithful love of God who

sent Jesus to die so you could live. You have the unwavering presence of the Holy Spirit who taught you to confess Christ's name and will be with you as **a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession. (Ephesians 1:14)**

This is the life and hope we have in our Risen Savior Jesus Christ. This is the life and hope you had given to you at your baptism... that we will all confess in the Creed in just a moment. The life and hope that you will have every day – no matter how good or bad those days are... until the day when faith is turned to sight by our Savior... when we'll fully enjoy the gift which is already ours – the salvation of our souls. The Risen Lord Jesus bless you and keep you to that day brothers and sisters... and give you confidence always because of the life and hope we have in him. Amen.

The peace of God that transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.