

July 26, 2020 – Pastor Larry Ellenberger

Sermon Text: I Peter 1:3-9

3 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. This inheritance is 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 all 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 the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – 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 end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

I have been waiting three and one-half months to wish you a “Happy Easter”. Pastor Adams asked me in February to preach for him the Sunday after Easter. He and Nancy were planning on going to California to visit his son and family. I said I would and when I got home, I looked up the Epistle lesson for the Sunday after Easter. It was the words of our text for this morning from I Peter 1. It was beautiful and powerful and I looked forward to preaching on the text. But all that changed with COVID-19. We weren't able to have services for a number of weeks including Easter and the Sunday after Easter. A few weeks ago he said again they were going to try to get to California and could I preach on the 26th of July. I said I would and when I got home I looked up the Epistle lesson for today from Romans 8. As I studied that text, it also spoke about hope, just as the one for the Sunday after Easter. I thought of preaching on that but the I Peter text kept coming back to my mind, and it seemed as though that also was a very fitting text for this Sunday. It reminds us of OUR LIVING HOPE.

We didn't always have this living hope. We were by nature hopeless because of sin. Left to ourselves, we would be hopelessly lost forever. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” “There is not a righteous person on earth that does good and doesn't sin.” How could this change? Our text reminds us it was God's great mercy. In his great mercy he came to change our hopeless condition. This was his grace at work in sending his own Son to save us from our sins and give us hope. Peter takes us to the foot of the cross in this first chapter and reminds us that we were “not redeemed with gold or silver but with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death as a lamb without blemish and spot.” I Peter 1:18

Remember Peter was there at the foot of the cross and heard Jesus declare, "It is finished." Because of Christ's work God promises in Jeremiah 31:34 and Hebrews 8:12 to remember our sins no more. Then as a seal and certainty of our salvation he raised Jesus from the dead and gives to us as our text reminds us "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Notice the words a living hope. This is not wishful thinking, but a firm conviction, trust and reliance. Jesus is alive! God's promise is alive! Our salvation is certain!

But before we get to that inheritance in heaven, God tells us in our text we may have to suffer "grief in all kinds of trials." Our Epistle lesson for today from Romans 8 uses an interesting word to describe these trials. It says that we "groan" under the weight of these trials and tribulations. That certainly describes our modern society. A recent poll indicated 80% of those surveyed were depressed. History tells us that depression today is worse than in the last 50 years. A recent NBC newscast highlighted this thought, "fearing for the future." It isn't just the COVID-19 virus which has claimed more than 140,000 people in our country, it is the protests, the looting, the disrespect for property and people. Again last evening, there was not a protest in Seattle, but as the news said, a riot. What can change all this? Who can give us a living hope? God in Christ Jesus gives us "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you." And so we walk by faith. Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ. Jesus says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So "let us run with perseverance the race set out before us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. . . so that we do not lose heart." Hebrews 12

So let all of us join Peter in offering praise to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And let us cling always to our living hope in our living Savior. Remember of all the religions in the world, only one has a living savior, and that is Christianity. All the rest have a "savior" who is dead and buried. By God's grace our Savior lives. Every Sunday is Easter. Every day in the Christian's life is Easter. And as someone has put it, "we are Easter Christians and Hallelujah is our song." We can still smile and sing our allelujahs even though we are wearing a mask. May God bless you and keep you in this living hope.