

The First Wednesday in Lent, February 24, 2021

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

Hope through Christ

1 Peter 1:1–16

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (vv 3b–5).

The world will *not* love you. Says who? Jesus, for one. He would know. His first sermon in Nazareth ended with an attempt to throw Him off a cliff. In His ministry, enemies demanded signs and tested Him with nasty set ups. And, in the end, He suffered just as the prophets of old had predicted—suffered death on the cross. The words of today's psalm are His words: **"But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people"** (Ps 22:6). The world will *not* love you. In fact, it will hate you, even as it hated Him. So don't strive to be loved, honored, and accepted. Instead,

BE FAITHFUL, ENDURE, AND LIVE AS ONE BORN AGAIN TO A LIVING HOPE.

Some Christians have faced full-fledged persecution from the government. That's not our situation. That's just not what we're going through right now. It also wasn't the situation of the Christians in northern Asia Minor, what is modern-day Turkey. These are the people to whom St. Peter wrote his first letter. But like them, you may experience the hatred of the world as mockery for not participating in its foolish and futile practices. You live differently than the world lives. You may experience that hatred of the world as misunderstanding of what you believe and slander about why you do what you do. You believe and worship differently than the world believes and worships. You may experience that hatred of the world by being called troublesome, anti-social, unloving, and disruptive to society. You follow a different way than the way the world follows. You follow the way of Christ.

Whatever trials you suffer, whatever hatred you experience, let it not be because of ungodly stubbornness, or rudeness, or any evil on your part. There are times we suffer trials and suffer the hatred of the world because, quite frankly, we deserve it, because of

our rudeness, our stubbornness, or some evil on our part. Let that not be the case for us as Christians. Rather, when you suffer or experience the hatred of the world, let it be only for the name of Christ. Wear your baptism proudly and on your sleeve. Lift high the cross that was traced upon your forehead and your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. Confess and praise the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If we are to suffer and if we are to experience the hatred of the world, let it be for these things. You, dear Christian, are baptized. Some listening to this may be preparing to be baptized or just plain curious about baptism.

We are baptized Christians. The world will *not* love you, but God loves you. **According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you—for you who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time** (vv 3b–5). There’s a lot in there, but let’s start with this: God has begotten you **to a living hope**. You are **born again**. You have been born from above by the Holy Spirit. You have been born again to a living hope through Holy Baptism.

That word “hope” can cause us all sorts of problems. Too often, we think of hope as a mere wish or desire. We confuse hope with a fantasy land or fairy tale or dream. That kind of hope is easily lost. It’s as easily lost as your keys or your wallet. That kind of hope can be crushed, as if it’s trash thrown into a compacter. That kind of hope can die, just like the childish dreams and visions we have for ourselves. That kind of hope is *not* Christian hope. That’s not what St. Peter is describing. It’s a mirage. It’s like a person who “sees” water in the desert. He crawls toward it only to see it vanish before his eyes.

Christian hope is different. Your hope is a living hope. Your hope is not a mirage. It’s real. It’s like a person dying in the desert who gets picked up and carried to an oasis, carried to a spring of water that never vanishes or runs dry, a spring whose source is eternally renewed and eternally life giving. What makes our hope living? It’s not how strongly we hope. It’s **the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead**. Our hope is a living hope because the One in whom we hope is alive. He has died, but He cannot die again, so our hope can never be lost. It can never be crushed. It can never die.

What is our hope? Our hope is in **an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading**. This inheritance cannot be taken from us. It’s what we have by being born again through baptism. No thief can break in and steal it. No moth or rust can destroy it. It is **kept in heaven for you**. The world will *not* love you. It may mock you. It may cancel you. It may de-platform you. But it cannot touch your inheritance. This inheritance of yours is beyond the reach of big tech, mainstream media, big business, or

any government. As we sang last Sunday, “take they our wife, goods, fame, child, and life, though these all be gone, our vict’ry has been won; the Kingdom ours remaineth.”

And you—**by God’s power you are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.** God is the one who gives you faith. He also keeps you in the faith and guards you through faith. What He has begun in you, He will bring to completion. He will see it through to the end.

What is the outcome of this faith and the goal of our hope? It is **the salvation of your souls**, a salvation that you already have in Christ but that will be revealed and unveiled when Christ returns in glory. It is that we would be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

This is why St. Peter says that we can rejoice. We rejoice even **though now, for a little while, if necessary, we are grieved by various trials.** Even though the world may mock us. Even though the world will certainly hate us. We rejoice because we know what our faith is looking forward to. We know what is already ours in Christ. So, as we go through trials, it’s like gold passing through a fire. These trials refine and purify our faith by sending us back to the One in whom we hope, to our Lord Jesus Christ. Every trial we endure, every suffering we face, we sorrow that meets us simply sends us back to Christ, back to His promises, back to His word, back to the sufferings He endured, the glory He received, and the promise of His coming again. This is the living hope we have through Christ, the living hope by which we endure the sufferings and trials of this life.

God keep us in this hope through Christ now and forever.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7