

# Introduction

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Welcome to St. Peter's Lutheran Church Estevan. Pastor Kleemola here to bring you a partial service for the Second Sunday of Easter Day - April 19, 2020.

## Readings for the Second Sunday of Easter

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First Reading: Acts 5:29-42  
Psalm: 148  
Epistle: 1 Peter 1:3-9  
Gospel: John 20:19-31

## Text for today's Sermon is taken from 1 Peter 1:3-9

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<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! 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, <sup>4</sup>to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup>In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup>Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, <sup>9</sup>obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

## Sermon – The Better Hope That Lives

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Dear friends in Christ Jesus; Hope is good. In a book by John Ortburg, (If you Want to Walk on the Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat) he cites medical research that studied men after they had their first heart attack. It was based on their degree of hopefulness or pessimism. Twenty-one of the twenty-five most pessimistic men died within eight years. Only six of the most optimistic died in the same time period. Hope was a better predictor of death than such

medical factors as high blood pressure and cholesterol level. Mr. Ortberg adds a humorous twist to make the point that hope is good: “Better to eat Twinkies in hope than to eat broccoli in despair.” (p 159)

What is hope? Hope is when you are struggling and you believe something better will happen. Hope is the expectation that something good will happen, something you have not seen or have happen yet. Hope is when you are holding out for a future that is rosier than what you are going through now.

One pastor tells the story of when his sister was first diagnosed with liver cancer. The whole family hoped that she would beat the odds and get better. They hoped that the medicine would work and destroy the cancer cells. They hoped that exercise and diet would make a difference. She was given just a few months to live, and when the one-year mark passed, they held out hope against hope that she would have more time with them. Hope is good when you are looking for a return to health.

When we hear of terrorist attacks and suicide bombings, we hope that peace will come to this battered world. We watch world leaders meet and hope that something good will happen for a change. We learn of a major terrorist leader being arrested or killed, and we hope that the violence will be slowed down. Hope is good when you want bloodshed to stop.

When we turn on the news and our eyes are met with a bridge collapse; we hope that people are not hurt or dead. We hope that rescue workers are successful in their searches. We hope that the bridges we travel over are sound and will not fall down. Hope is good when you are concerned about keeping people safe and out of danger.

Yes, hope is good, but deep down inside we know that hope dies all too soon when the future is uncertain or what we hope for will only be temporary. The sister of the pastor I mentioned earlier died of cancer just a few months after the one-year mark on the calendar. Their good hopes were dashed when no more medicine could be given, and no more food could be eaten.

A lull in the war against terrorism is shattered by another bomb exploding, another plot being uncovered, another day of soldiers killed. Our good hopes disappear when evil wins out over peace, when death takes innocent lives.

Deep inside we know the next disaster is soon to happen. A hurricane, tornado, plane crash, flood, tsunami, building collapse, earthquake – something will be the next breaking news story that will knock the depressing statistics regarding COVID -19 out of the top spot. Our good hopes for safety die just a little more each day with each new catastrophe.

Now don't get me wrong here. Hope is good and we are not to give up hoping for health, safety, peace, and a better future. Those are good hopes. But they are also dying hopes because they are uncertain or will not last.

It's not hard to make a list of words that begin with the letter "D" and describe how these good hopes are dying hopes. Discouragement, despair, disease, disaster, devil, disappointment, disobedience, depression, distance from God, detractors, and death. The last one is literally the killer of hope – death.

I am not sure why, but so many cemeteries seem to be on a low hill, exposed to the harshest weather conditions. In the heat of summer, with grass turned brown, or the dead of winter with an icy wind blowing down your neck, you stand amidst a sea of eroding gravestones, and deep inside you know hopes for health and safety and something good died when the caskets were lowered into the ground. Yes, good hopes die.

But even when these good hopes die, we know there is a better hope that still lives. Against all dying hopes, we have one hope that lives deep inside of us. You can hear it in the apostle Peter's words. "Praise be to the God and Father." "Greatly rejoice." "An inexpressible and glorious joy." "An inheritance that can never spoil, fade, or perish." These first verses of Peter's letter shout hope – living hope – as he encourages his readers with the reason for the better hope that lives. God has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!

What is this better hope? Hope is when you are struggling and you believe something better will happen because Jesus will never leave you or forsake you. He lives and guards the salvation that has been given to you. Hope is the expectation that something good will happen, something we have not seen or have happen yet. We have not experienced life after death. We have not had the Last Day resurrection of the dead that will empty all the cemeteries in the world. But that inheritance is kept in heaven for us. Hope is when you are holding out for a future that is rosier than what you are going through now. Even when good hopes die, we have deep within us a better hope, the hope of the resurrected Lord Jesus who lives for us, who lives within us, who lives to give us life, peace, and safety with Him that will never fade or die or disappear.

When we're on a road trip and drive through a smaller town or city, the cemetery often will be right on the main highway through town. And when we go by – especially if it seems to be a large cemetery for the size of town – I will almost invariably say, "Wow, there are a lot of dead people who live here" – sort of a Dad thing to say, and a bit of an inside joke between Tarja and me. But when you think about that statement a bit, it's sort of a hopeful thing to say if by living, you mean that the souls that went with the bodies in the cemetery are living eternally with Jesus rather than suffering eternal death with the devil in hell.

But I digress. What I originally intended to say was that during certain seasons, the grass in the cemetery is a faded brown instead of green and gives the landscape a very dead look. But almost always, on some of the graves, people have placed flowers, and the colour and beauty of the flowers can remind us that hope lives even in a cemetery.

You see, the flowers take me back to Easter and all the flowers that fill many churches on that joyous day of celebration. They take me back to the first Easter morning when Jesus' tomb is empty. I see Mary Magdalene, whose hopes were dashed by Jesus' death on the cross, now holding on tightly to her risen Lord. Her hopes are alive again. Deep inside she knows that even though death may kill some good hopes, she has her arms around the better hope, the eternal hope, the hope for salvation that cannot be taken from her no matter what "D" word may invade her life.

And this same hope lives within us as we bury a sister, a mother, a spouse, a child, or a close friend. In the service at the graveside, we read this paragraph:

We now commit the body of (you fill in the name) to its resting place; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subdue all things to Himself. (LSB Agenda p 130)

In preparing for this sermon, I came across a helpful item of how Easter brings a living hope. It is just a short saying: "Easter is the New Year's Day of the soul." (Christianity Today, vol 41, no 4) New Year's Day: a day of hope for a brand-new year. A day pictured as a new baby full of life and promise walking in while the old man of last year walks away. Easter is the New Year's Day of our souls. The old and dying give way to the new and living. The resurrection of Jesus Christ brings new birth deep within us: it brings a faith that lives in the promise of something better kept in heaven for us. Because Jesus lives, our hope lives.

And you know what? The living hope makes even the dying hopes good. We hope for health because we believe that God's healing touch reaches into our lives today to give temporary reprieve from the disease and despair that invade our bodies. We hope for peace because we believe God works times of quiet and protection as a little bit of relief from the destruction and death of this violent world. We hope for safety because we believe God sends His guardian angels to defend us from so many times of disaster.

Yes, hope is good, but even when good hopes die, we have been given a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Amen.

## Prayer of the Church

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Hear us, merciful Father, as we pray for ourselves, for the Church, for our nation and for all conditions and manner of people.

God of mercy, keep us from the doubts and fears that cripple us and prevent us from knowing the fullness of Your saving peace and gracious presence. Teach us to trust in Your Word and to believe with all our hearts, minds, bodies and strength in Jesus Christ, crucified for our sins and raised for our justification.

Bestow upon Your Church Your Holy Spirit and all the gifts that come down from on high. Grant to us faithful pastors who will preach faithfully and ears to hear Your Word proclaimed. Give us boldness in our witness before the world and courage to speak Your name without fear.

Give courage and strength to those persecuted for the faith, and comfort the families of the martyrs. Keep Your Church from following the winds of change, and make her steadfast in the doctrine of the apostles and the faith once delivered to the saints. Help us to admonish those who have fallen away with Your Word and to restore with gentleness those who have wandered from the truth.

Counsel the nations and their leaders in the paths of peace and justice. Bless us with wise, faithful and just leaders who will protect the sanctity of life and defend us against all enemies. Make us wise and discerning citizens who use the gift of liberty for noble purpose.

Teach us to love one another as You have loved us. Guide us so that in our neighbourhoods and communities we may manifest the love of Christ as well as His strength. Deliver us from all that would threaten our homes and families. Protect the police, firefighters, disaster-relief workers and medical personnel who attend to us, as well as the places where we live and work.

Give Your aid and relief to all who suffer want or need, to the sick in their afflictions, to those troubled in mind, and to those to whom death draws near, especially Pattie Berday, Dean Euteneier,, Gerald Olson, and Wanda Stang. Heal and sustain them according to Your gracious will, and preserve them in faith to eternal life.

Be with those who grieve the loss of those whom they love. Point them to the promise of the resurrection and the gift of everlasting life to all who die in Christ.

Deliver us from the distractions of things that do not matter, that we may focus on the needful things of Your Word and Sacraments and so be found faithful when our Lord returns in His glory.

Bless us with the good gifts of the earth, with the fruits of our honest labours, and with a kind and generous heart. Accept the worship of our hearts and voices along with the tithes and offerings we bring as part of our gratitude and thanksgiving. Open our eyes and hearts to the needs of the poor, that we may serve them in Your name.

Give harmony and unity to Your people, both in our various vocations before the world and in our common life. Help us to receive with repentance and joy the gift of Christ's body and blood in this blest communion, that we may be strengthened in faith and enjoy the gift of a

clear conscience through the forgiveness of our sins.

O blessed God and Lord, hear the prayers of Your people and teach us to trust in Your will to answer our prayers with all that is needful and beneficial, both for us and for all for whom we have prayed; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## Benediction

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The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.