

## A Living Hope

1 Peter 1:3-9

<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup>In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer

various trials, <sup>7</sup>so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup>Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup>for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

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Peter was no university or seminary trained theologian. He had learned faith by following Jesus, failing and growing. And his journey included monumental pains.

Peter had committed his life to Jesus. He had left his career and was following this rabbi. Peter saw in Jesus the one who had words of eternal life. But Peter's life began to unravel at a frightening pace.

Amid the annual festival of Passover, Judas betrayed Jesus. Soldiers arrested him. The religious and the secular

authorities tried him. Jesus was repeatedly beaten and then died the shameful, painful death on a cross. All of this in a day's time.

The horror of it all included Peter's denial that he knew Jesus.

Peter writes to us not as one who had lived an insulated life, but as one who knew pain, suffering and death. Almost as fast as Jesus had died, news came that Jesus' tomb was empty...and soon the risen Jesus met Peter.

How would Jesus treat the one who had first worshipped him and later denied knowing him?

Jesus forgave him and gave him the important job of feeding Jesus' sheep.

It was as if Peter's own life had come from a tomb, as if he had been reborn with this second start.

And so it was that this Peter wrote to Christians who were suffering trials.

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He wasted no time in emphasizing that all who follow Jesus have been born anew by

the mercy of God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We certainly live in a Good Friday world where violence brings the death of innocent people.

Sometimes we would deny the truth of our neighborhood...and then there is a Virginia Tech shooting, or the 9/11 attack, or the mass forced suicide of Jim Jones followers.

We do live in a Good Friday world, but the taunts of soldiers and Jesus' death upon the cross did not hold the last word.

The victory is told by the  
Empty tomb  
Appearance of Jesus  
Jesus' call to go out into the  
world to make disciples

Violence and death that once  
stole from the living have been  
looted by resurrection life.

And with resurrection comes a  
new birth for those who follow  
Jesus. We are given a new life by  
the Holy Spirit – in our baptisms  
we die to sin and are raised to  
become the children of God we  
were created to be.

If reborn by the Spirit (sired by  
God) we become the heirs of  
God.

We become the heirs of eternal  
life – kept safe for us in heaven  
where violence and death cannot  
touch it.

Wickedness can  
touch us,  
punch us,  
knock us down  
even kill us  
but it cannot take our inheritance  
from us.

The young adults and faculty  
were robbed of their earthy life.

It is a great tragedy that will be with parents and other loved ones for the rest of their lives.

But that sadness is rightly enfolded in God's promise that their inheritance is safe through Jesus Christ. We can say that by the mercy of God they who were losers in life are winners in death.

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Peter encouraged the followers about their future, but he is also offered the practical advice to not get locked into the suffering.

We look forward to the time when pain and death are no more and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Like vacation after the rush of work

Like health and renewed strength after painful surgery

We look beyond our graves to our new home in heaven.

In the presence of such suffering we are reminded that we live in the world, but we are not of the world.

Reborn by the power of God, we are children of God whose eternal home is not here, but heaven.

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Because we are called to be in the world, at work for God's good purposes here and now, God redeems the suffering of this life.

Peter shared what must have been a personal experience of growing through suffering.

Like the precious metal gold that is refined through fire, so our

lives and faith are refined through our suffering.

Our impurities are removed:

False hope in the goodness of the world

Self-reliance

We are reminded that both our world and we ourselves need a savior.

Tragedy returns our hearts and minds to God where we say with the psalmist

*Be pleased O God to deliver me*

*O lord, make hast to help me.*<sup>1</sup>

And help God does.

The word Peter wrote for *various* trials is the same word that Peter later used for the grace of God.<sup>2</sup>

There is grace to match every trial and there is no trial without its grace.

In reminding early Christians of this, he is joining the chorus of Scriptural witnesses like John who said that Jesus is the light of the world shining in the darkness

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 70:1

<sup>2</sup> I Peter 4:10

which the darkness has not overcome.

And the psalmist who said, “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me.”<sup>3</sup>

The grace of God has been evident in ways that the Virginia Tech community have been lifted up and supported in prayer.

Some of the churches decided to make meals for the students who would have the comfort of a meal prepared in love.

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 23

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Born anew by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are the sired children of God and therefore the heirs of God.

Our inheritance includes eternal life without suffering, pain and death. It is safeguarded in heaven so that nothing can destroy that.

We hold up all our suffering to the template of Good Friday and Easter which reminds us that it is not death but God's resurrection life that wins.

We can endure our trials by looking beyond our suffering to our heavenly home. And we can trust that our suffering will help us to return to God and grow.

So don't give suffering the last word. Welcome the help of our crucified and risen savior and embrace the opportunity to grow that God will give you.

This hope of ours is not some naive, wishful fantasy; it is one of the fruits of Easter that Peter himself experienced.

Thanks be to God for our living hope!