

Sunday, April 1, 2018 – Easter Sunday Sunrise
“Heading Home – Heartened and Hopeful”

1 Peter 1: 3-9

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Comparison/Contrast Structure

Adapted from CSL “Calling Us Home” Series

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

What a great day! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! I'll tell you, I could preach forever about Easter. (Oh, no! Don't tell me he's got a long sermon!) And this service could go on forever! (Huh?) The fact is, it will. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and we are going to rise with him and our life will go on forever. “In my Father's house are many rooms (‘mansions,’ KJV),” Jesus says. “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself that where I am you may be also” (John 14:2–3). Easter: we're heading home and getting closer all the time. Therefore, let's put a smile on our face and bounce into our step. As Isaiah says it, we “shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not!’” (Isaiah 35:3–4). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is heading us home, heartened and full of hope.

We often lose heart. When St. Peter wrote to Christians long ago, he said, “You rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.” Isn't that the truth? Think about all the trials and troubles that come your way. Some of you had your heart ripped out of you this past year by the death of a loved one. All sorts of earthly trials come our way. Problems in relationships, problems at work or lack of work, financial worries, health worries... We're often waiting for the next shoe to drop. And persecution... That was a big issue for the people to whom Peter wrote. They were taking it on the chin for Christ. Sometimes when you and I honor God and keep the commandments, we feel slandered and shunned. We lose heart. Our heads might know the religious aspirin, “All things work together for good” and so on, but it's a long way from religious knowledge in the head down to the heart. We lose heart and wonder where is God? What's God doing?

Peter tells us where God is and what He's doing. “Now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 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.” In those times when you lose heart, when you

wonder what God is doing, God is in fact refining your faith. Strange as it seems, God uses adversities to draw us more and more to himself. We love to sing the hymn, “Just as I am.” Just as I am, without one plea but that Thy blood was shed for me And that thou bidd’st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.”

That’s true enough, but what we often forget is that God loves you and me too much to leave us just as we are. Trial by trial, year by year, decade by decade, God is refining our faith. And where is God? He’s in Jesus Christ, the One who suffered but by His resurrection and ascension is now in glory. Slowly but surely God is leading you and me to depend solely upon His goodness to us in Jesus Christ. “O Lamb of God, I come, I come.”

That still doesn’t make it easy. A nice Easter service once a year isn’t enough. The lilies fade pretty fast. How does the resurrection of Jesus Christ put heart back into us when we’re going through tough times? The answer is “mercy.” Listen to this great text: “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.” As we talked about in one of our midweek services, mercy or the plural, mercies, are specific, hands-on acts of loving kindness that God does for us and we in turn do for one another. Mercy is not just a feeling of pity; it’s help, real help. When your heart is broken, God’s mercies start to put your heart together again. He gives His help, His mercies, His loving-kindnesses because He’s our Father. The psalmist says, “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.” (Psalm 103:13–14) Your Father gives mercies, loving-kindnesses to hearten you during down times. The Father’s mercies come to you from all directions. Sometimes it might be directly from His word in a church service. Mercies often come from the people in the church. I’m sure you’ve experienced that. You’re going through a tough time and another believer comes alongside you with encouragement and the promise, “I’ll be praying for you.” We have this caring relationship with one another because of our Father and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mercies give us heart and they give us hope. Peter says, we have been “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” “Hope” is one of those words we throw around in church but what does it really mean? There’s not much substance

when you hear people talk about hope. “I hope the Golden Knights will go all the way this year.” “I hope we have a mild summer.” Maybe you get it; maybe you don’t. The world talks about hope in a wishy-washy way. The hope that the Bible talks about is sure and certain. In fact, those are the words we use in the cemetery, “the sure and certain hope of the resurrection.” Our hope is sure and certain because it’s based upon God’s promises to us. Would God make all these wonderful Easter promises to us and then not keep them? Then God would be a liar. Impossible! God will keep His Easter promises. “If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him . . . If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:11–13). All the Father’s good promises to you are “Yeah and Amen” in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Our hope is active; it fresh every day with newness of life. Peter calls it a “living hope.” We have been “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 . . .” You are baptized and your heart is hopeful because your inheritance is “kept in heaven for you.” For you! There is a mansion reserved for you! Don’t be complacent. Don’t ignore the devil and temptations. Surround yourself with God’s Word and confidence in His mercies. “You who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice.”

He brings me to the portal that leads to bliss untold,

Whereon this rhyme immortal is found in script of gold:

‘Who there My cross has shared finds here a crown prepared;

Who there with Me has died shall here be glorified. (LSB 467, 7)

A couple years ago, right about this time in fact, it was the week after Easter, I was in the San Diego area and went on a hike up Mt. Woodson. The goal wasn’t the top, but rather a strange rock formation near the top made famous in the age of social media. It’s called Potato Chip rock – a bit of granite perched over the side of a mountain. People like to go take pictures and use it as their profile picture. But what you can see from far away is there is a gap – the rock starts a couple feet away from the edge of the mountain and there’s a little gap in between.

There's also a four foot drop. The only way over is to jump. Skilled climbers would think nothing of this but I'm not what you'd call a skilled climber.

So I make it over and after we have our picture, I want to go back. Here I am standing on one level and want to get up to a higher level. Thankfully some off-duty Marines were there and someone held out their hand to help me up. I gladly took the hand, put one foot up on the safe side, made sure the grip is tight, made sure the higher foot is secure, and bounced a time or two, rocking, crouching back and forth with the foot that is still on the lower ground.

That's a picture of living hope. We're heading home and hanging onto God's hand, all the promises He has made to us through Jesus. Part of our life, a foot as it were, is already in heaven because we are God's chosen and elect people. And what is still on the ground, still on earth, has a bounce to it because we know where we're going. That's hope, hope fueled by mercies, buoyant hope, lively hope, living hope, hope that puts a spring into your step. And that's Easter. It will go on forever. "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees." Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Amen.