



The Second Sunday of Easter (A) – 1 Peter 1:3-9

Focus: *A Living Hope*

word of life

“By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...” (1 Peter 1:3b NRSV)

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9

Easter Sunday is a joyous day as we celebrate the risen Christ. Death has been defeated! Let the choirs sing and the trumpets sounds. Let the church overflow with crowds adorned in their Easter best. But what comes next? What follows the triumphal festival of Easter?

1. *Compare the crowd at Easter Sunday and the Sunday which follows Easter.*

In reality what follows Easter Sunday is the living of the faith which may or may not always be an easy path. The First Letter of Peter is written as a practical primer for Christians that can assist those who face challenges with this practical living of the Easter faith. The lectionary for the season of Easter includes a series of six lessons from the First Letter of Peter. (Take time during the season of Easter to read all five chapters of 1 Peter in its entirety.)

Interestingly enough, it is not clear whether Peter is the actual writer (or one of his followers). The Greek is exceptional for an uneducated fisherman such as Peter. In addition, it doesn't read like it was written by someone well-acquainted with Jesus. Whoever authored this letter knew his audience had endured persecution for following Jesus Christ and was in need of encouragement.

Despite facing difficulties, the recipients of this letter are instructed to keep the faith in the crucified and risen 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...” (1 Peter 1:3b) Hope is alive and living because hope has been embodied in Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. Hope is real and tangible because Jesus lives.

2. *What does the phrase “living hope” mean?*
3. *When and how are we given a new birth into a living hope of Jesus Christ?*

The author wastes little time getting to the heart of the matter for an audience who had suffered because of their faith in Jesus. Suffering can produce a genuineness of faith, made pure because of testing. “In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, 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.” (1 Peter: 1:6-7 NRSV)

4. *How might these words console and give hope to those who are suffering?*
5. *How might suffering produce a genuineness of faith?*

This letter was written to those who had never interacted with Jesus or knew him. Yet they loved Jesus and believed in him. That love and belief led to a deep and indescribable joy “for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:9 NRSV) For the generation who interacted with Jesus, it was significant to realize people would be able to love and follow Jesus without ever having met him on this earth. Their hope was based on a living hope in the risen Jesus Christ.

6. *Describe the possible range of feelings experienced by those who personally knew Jesus as they witnessed the faith being passed to those who never had the opportunity to interact with Jesus.*

Word among us

Anthony was taking a walk around the block when he noticed the free food in the courtyard at a neighborhood church. He had always been curious about what happened in a church. So, he took a deep breath and walked into the courtyard to check things out at the food table. Next thing Anthony knew, he was being escorted into a large room with an organ blasting away. The smell of lilies was so strong that he almost fell to the ground. He didn't understand much which occurred in that big beautiful room, but there was a lot of upbeat music. Everyone was friendly and welcoming.

The next Sunday Anthony planned ahead and returned to the same place at the same time. But this time there was no food in the courtyard. There were plenty of places to sit in the big room because it was only half-filled. He noticed a few lilies on a long white table. The music was still upbeat, but there were fewer singers in the choir. Anthony didn't understand the difference between the two Sundays.

Anthony asked a woman handing out programs about the difference between the two Sundays. She smiled and explained, "Oh! This is the Sunday *after* Easter." For Anthony, that wasn't much of an explanation.

1. *What had Anthony experienced in the church?*
2. *How do you explain the reduced attendance at many churches following Easter Sunday?*
3. *What can be done to encourage visitors on Easter Sunday to return?*

Our times are quite different than when the New Testament was written. Those who worship on Easter Sunday in a church in the United States have probably not endured persecution. Police do not wait outside churches ready to arrest those who attended an Easter worship service. In contrast, the recipients of the First Letter of Peter were living in times of persecution and hardship. To believe in the Easter story of Jesus was to face risks and consequences. There is nothing like the possibility of suffering and persecution to help clarify religious beliefs.

4. *How might faith change under the reality of persecution?*

faith practice in daily life

Live among God's faithful people

In baptism, God has given us a new birth as we begin a new life in Christ. Each day we renew the baptismal covenant as we resolve to live as God intended. God's Spirit opens us to new ways of living and responding in our daily lives.

Yesterday does not have to determine tomorrow. "By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." (1 Peter 1:3b NRSV)

5. *What changes in us knowing we have a living hope?*
6. *Who needs to hear a message of hope today?*

Prayer

Gracious God, by your great mercy, you have given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Give us courage to claim and proclaim that hope. Amen

last word

Invite someone this week to attend worship with you.

Daily Faith Practices

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