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The Resurrection of Our Lord – Easter Day

Text: 1 Peter 1:3-9 (NIV)

Preached: 4/4/10 at Our Savior Lutheran Church, Springville, NY

*<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup> These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

### A Living Hope

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it! Because this day happened -- because of Easter -- we never have to be afraid again. Because of Easter, we don't have to wonder what will happen to us when we die. Because of Easter, we know all God's promises will come true and we'll have all eternity to thank him for it. Because of Easter, we have hope. But what is "hope" exactly? You hear the word all the time, from movies to political campaigns. We say the word ourselves. But what does the word actually mean?

It's a word that's used in different ways, with slightly different meanings. You could be talking about something that you have no expectation of actually happening. For example, you might say, "I hope I win the lottery." That's nice that you hope that, but I think we all know it's not going to happen. The odds are stacked against you. Hope all you want; you're probably not going to win the lottery anytime soon.

Sometimes we use the word for something that is a bit more likely to actually happen. "I hope we keep this nice weather up outside" or, "I hope it doesn't rain today." That might really happen. The weather might be great. But it also might not happen. Rain clouds could come, the weather could turn, and your hope would be wrong.

But there's another kind of hope. There's a hope for something that hasn't happened yet, but that we know will happen. It's something we're confident will happen. It's something we trust will happen. That's the "hope" that Easter gives us. Because of Easter, we have the

sure hope that everything is going to work out for our good, because of what our Savior has done. He gives us that sure hope -- a living hope.

That's what our text is talking about. Peter wrote our text, and even though it was probably 30 years or so after the first Easter he's still just gushing with emotion as he writes, "**Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**" (1 Pet. 1:3) It sounds like Peter is still filled with the same excitement that he must have had when Jesus first rose.

And even though we weren't there when Jesus rose, even though we didn't get to see him and the nail marks in his hands and feet, just maybe we can feel that excitement a little bit, too. If there's any day where we'd feel it, it'd be today. The Easter lilies, the feeling of an Easter Sunday morning, the hymns and songs we sing, it might fill your heart with that excitement, that living hope, that Peter is writing about. It might remind you that we do have a God who loves us, and a Savior who died and lives for us.

But it's hard to keep that excitement, that feeling going. How can you keep hope in your heart when the more you see of life all around you, the more things seem hopeless? There's so much talk about a recession and unemployment and "tough times" in our world today. You call that hopeful?

Our individual lives have their own problems, too. It could be not enough money to pay the bills. It could be fighting and turmoil in our relationships in our families, with our spouse, with our friends. It could be our work or school that just isn't going how we thought it would. It could be our plans that just never seem to amount to much of anything. And we wonder if God even loves us at all. You call that hopeful?

Peter, who wrote our text, would've understood these feelings. Sure, he'd been there on the first Easter. We heard about him in today's Gospel running to the tomb and seeing the burial cloths laying there. But was he overjoyed? Was the excitement just pouring out of him then? No. The Gospel of Luke tells us that when the women told the disciples about the empty tomb, "**they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.**" (Lk. 24:11) Then after Peter gets to the tomb himself, we hear that "**he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.**" (Lk. 24:12)

That first Easter *didn't* start out full of happy excitement, not for Peter. He and the other disciples, though Jesus had told them about it several times, still didn't understand or believe that he would rise from the dead. Peter himself had extra reason to feel bad. He had denied Jesus. He had abandoned his teacher, his Lord, and he had denied even knowing who he was. Who knows? Maybe Peter could have stopped this horrible tragedy from happening. Maybe he have done *something*. But he didn't. And he felt the guilt. How could God love someone like him?

Our mistakes and sins can bring that feeling to us. You might have that one sin that you know is wrong, but you keep doing it anyway. And every time you think...I failed again. And I really call myself a Christian? God must really hate me at this point. What's the point of even trying anymore? And that guilt of our sin robs us of our joy and takes away our hope, leaving us empty.

But look! There at the tomb! It's empty, too! Friends, Peter might not have understood what that meant at first, but we do. An empty tomb means a living Jesus! A living Jesus means that our sins have been forgiven! Sins forgiven mean that we, too, will live forever in heaven. No matter what happens to us now, eternal life is the reward Jesus won for us! His empty tomb gives us a living hope!

And our hope is not just for heaven. Our living hope also means everything in our lives now. Peter recognizes the struggles we face. "**Now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.**" (1 Pet. 1:6) Yes, life in this sinful world won't be easy. But since that tomb is empty, we won't be going it alone.

Think of it this way. Imagine you needed a ride from here to the airport. That's a bit of a drive, about an hour. But imagine that someone not only agreed to drive you to the airport, he also said he'd give you a ride whenever you need it. So later on, if you need a ride again, even if it's just a few blocks here in Springville, would you hesitate to ask that person? Of course not! He already drove you to the airport, of course he'll drive you a few blocks.

Now think of Jesus. He went to the grave. He went to hell and back -- for you! He died and rose -- for you! If Jesus did that much for you, won't he also be willing to be with you in the struggles of this life? If he fulfilled his promise of dying and rising, won't he also fulfill his promise of hearing your prayers and taking your burdens? Of course he will! Because the tomb is empty, because Jesus rose, we have comfort in our trials. We have a living hope!

In fact, our troubles actually benefit us now. Peter reminds us of this. "**These [trials] have come so that your faith -- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire -- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.**" (1 Pet. 1:7)

Think of it, as you go through problems and struggles in your life. Because Jesus rose, he promises not only to be with you through those problems, he promises to use those problems to strengthen your faith. He uses your problems to drive you back to his Word, to rejoice again in how he died and rose for you. He uses your problems to remind you of your baptism, where God made you his own dear child forever. He uses your problems to drive you back to the altar to receive his true body and blood for your forgiveness! He

blesses you, even through your problems -- all the way to eternal life. That's the living hope that only Jesus can give us.

And he gives that living hope to us freely. I hope you're excited today, and you have that Easter frame of mind. I hope it's a day that you're excited to be a child of God and believer in Jesus. But if you don't have that excitement, or if the excitement fades, don't worry. Jesus' love doesn't depend on your excitement. It depends on what he has done. And he has left his tomb empty. And he's promised that your tomb will be empty, too. He has solved the problem of your sin and promised to be with you through all your problems in life. He is your Savior, and he's given you a living hope.

We close with Peter's words, just as true today as they were when he wrote them. **"Though you have not seen [Jesus], you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."** (1 Pet. 3:9)