

"Tested Faith"

1 Peter 1:3-9

April 23, 2017

2nd Sunday of Easter

Ok, so now what?

There is no more anti-climactic day in the church calendar than the Sunday after Easter. After a six-week time of preparation in Lent; after many days of the children practicing a special song to sing; after weeks and weeks of practice by the adult choir; after careful selection of special music and practice of that music by the organist; after careful selection of hymns and a sermon text and the diligent writing of a special sermon by the pastor; after all these things, we have a wonderful celebration of the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ. The church was fuller than usual. There were people worshiping that we don't normally see here. We sang robustly and worshiped God to the point of exhaustion (if the length of my afternoon nap that day is any indication).

And now that's all done for another year and is in the past. So, what do we do now? Many people probably think that it's time to go back life as usual – life as we had it before Easter. That's why now is so anti-climactic. After a Lenten burst of special devotion and concentration on holy living, we return to a life characterized by sin and the consequences of sin. We let sin take control again without the Lenten emphasis of repentance being displayed as strongly now.

We go back to noticing more closely the effects of sin in our world and become afraid. Every day is marked by a new political threat by Russia or North Korea; a new act of terror by Isis or Al Qaeda; or some mass shooting in a school or a mall. The will of God regarding life issues, sexual morality, earthly wealth, and other things are being ignored, perverted, or changed and we become discouraged. We are dying from within because of our personal sins of thought, word, and deed – the good we've failed to do and the evil we have so willingly done – and dying from the outside from the sin and evil that surrounds us.

That leaves us with a disturbingly hopeless feeling. It seems as if no one in our world is happy. Everyone is being offended by anything and everything that anyone else says or does. Television news brings us video of the latest protest du jour. Everybody is protesting something, often in ways that are not peaceful and which leads to more violence.

Since there doesn't seem to be much hope for the future, we often allow ourselves to be enticed by the things of this world: the newest technology, the latest creature comforts, an abundance of the necessities of life and so on. We often neglect the things of God so we can have the time to attain the things of this world and enjoy them. Do these things really satisfy us and make us happy? Or do we find ourselves on a treadmill, constantly trying to get more and newer and better things, and constantly being worn out and discouraged, rather than happy and satisfied? The things of this world lack staying power. They are consumed, outgrown, broken, or superseded by newer versions.

We probably should be amazed that a holiday like Easter is able to provide any joy or excitement at all, even one day's worth. The power of sinfulness, materialism, and godlessness is increasing. The desire and peer pressure exerted on occasional Christians to come to church even on Easter is decreasing. The end of Easter can be a letdown for faithful Christians but hardly noticed by occasional Christians and others.

But that's the problem right there. Easter is not supposed to be just a day on the Church or secular calendar. The observance of Easter is NOT supposed to be the end of Lent or anything else. It is to be the beginning of something new and wonderful.

St. Peter is saying just that in our text for today. He is talking to people who are not simply suffering from an Easter let down. These are people who have lost everything they had for the sake of Christ and are now being persecuted and suffering for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. St. Peter has good news for them (and for us) based on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead..

First, St. Peter writes, "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." Instead of returning to the old sinful life which we had before, St. Peter says we have been born again and have a completely new and different life. This happened in our baptism. In Holy Baptism, each of us died with Christ and, thus, had our sin taken away from us. As Christ was raised from the dead, so, we, too, have been raised from the death of sin to newness of life. With the dawn of Easter, we are reminded that we have that new life and the desire to live in that new life, rather than be dragged down by our sinful life which existed before our baptism.

We now have a living hope. Much of what passes for hope in this world is just wishful thinking. It is empty wishes, false promises, and deceptive claims. That's why we are often so disappointed or discouraged

by life. We have no real hope and the hope that we do have is worthless. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead has given us true hope for the future. Our hope is not wishful, but certain. Our hope is not based on the deceptive dreams of this world, but on the solid promises of God which are always true and never deceive us.

What is our hope for the future? St. Peter writes that we have been born again “to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” You know what an inheritance is, don’t you? It is something of great wealth or value that is yours, but not yet in your possession. You only receive it when someone dies. Since Jesus died, the greatest inheritance of all has become yours and will come into your personal possession when our living Lord returns to earth on the last day.

The trouble with most inheritances is that they are consumed, used, or broken. The inheritance which Jesus died for you to have and rose from the dead for you to receive is imperishable – it is never broken or destroyed. It is undefiled – it never spoils or loses its value. It is unfading – it never is consumed or used up. And you can’t possibly lose it or have it taken from you because it is being kept in heaven for you.

And what is that inheritance? St. Peter writes, “[you] by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” You have salvation – rescue from this broken world of sorrow, sin, and death and entrance into an eternal life of joy, holiness, and life in heaven with God forever. That will be the eternal Easter with no letdown ever again.

We rejoice in that new life, that living hope, the promised inheritance, and the salvation, all of which are ours through the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross and are guaranteed to us by His resurrection from the dead. But that doesn’t mean things are smooth and easy as we sit around waiting for these Easter promises to come true. There are a couple of problems that plague us.

First, there will be troubles to experience. St. Peter says, “You rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.” If you remain faithful in the Lord and walking in His ways, there will be strong temptations to stray from pure faith and pure living. Satan, the world, and even from with yourself will come temptations to give up. If you continue faithful in faith and living, avoiding and ignoring those temptations, there will be suffering of all kinds for you to endure.

Yet, St. Peter sees good even in that. The trials and temptations will serve to strengthen your faith and your walk with God. It is like gold ore which is put in the fire. The fire burns hot and burns the ore, but it does so only to do away with the impure matter and leave only the pure gold. So trials and temptations will burn hot and burn us, but only to do away with that which is sinful and evil and leave only pure faith and a strong Christian life.

Secondly, we have the “Thomas problem.” We don’t see Jesus as we live our life of faith in the midst of trials and temptations. We follow Jesus, not only not seeing Him NOW but never having seen Him ever. This is, no doubt, very difficult to do. Even though we know Jesus is truly present among us in our worship, in His Word, and in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, it is still difficult not seeing Him.

Yet we take comfort and rejoice because both Jesus and Peter encourage us to do so. In addressing Thomas after he refused to believe without seeing Him, Jesus encourages us to feel blessed that we believe without having seen Him. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” St. Peter encourages us to rejoice in our situation, rather than dwell on our inability to see Jesus in the flesh yet, saying, “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, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Do not let the time of Easter become anti-climactic at all. Let us live as Easter Christians who gather together to make every Sunday a “little Easter.” We see Jesus with the eyes of faith as He appears in the midst of our worship to comfort us, as He speaks to us through His Word to encourage us, and as He comes to us in His Body and Blood in His Supper to strengthen us. We rejoice in His resurrection from the dead as we live the new life given to us in our baptism, as we experience a living and vibrant hope for the future, and as we look forward to receiving our “inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for [us]”, the salvation of our souls. Ok, so now what? THAT’S what! Amen.