

This Sunday's texts:

Acts 5:29-42

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

**Living Hope**  
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The Holy Gospel according to John in the 20th chapter:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After He said this, He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my fingers where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." A week later His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

The gospel of the Lord.

Before I was in Youth Ministry, I was in social work. So my first job out of college, I was at this non-profit and I was really loving it. I was loving working with the clients. I was meeting friends and going to lunch with them. I was being invited even to their birthday parties and their baby showers. Things were going well. Then it was about 4 to 5 months while I was working there and the agency decided to have diversity training. So they brought us all together in a large amphitheater. It was the staff and all the volunteers. So there were about two

hundred of us there. The moderator would stand in the front and she would read different categories. If you were in that category, you would come to the front, turn to face the audience and they would ask you questions. So the moderator was almost finished with her list. She looked down and she said, "There's one category left. I know in this room of educated people that no one here would believe something so archaic, but I'm going to read it anyway, just for laughs." So she stood there and she said, "If you believe in God, if you call yourself a Christian or a Catholic, come forward." So I stood up and I was the only one. I walked all the way down. I turned and faced the audience. Everybody looked at me with scowls and glares. I couldn't believe it! I never experienced anything like that in my walk with God. Previously when I went up for identifying as Latina, people were smiling and warm. These same people were now glaring at me and scowling at me.

Needless to say, that event propelled me into social suicide. So all the lunch invitations stopped. People were professional to me, but they weren't nice. They weren't kind. They weren't warm or friendly. They stopped inviting me to do things after work.

One day, I was sitting at my desk, eating my lunch alone and one of my co-workers looked around to make sure nobody saw that she was talking to me. She came up to me and said, "I need to talk to you, but not here." So she led me away and we kept going further and further away from the offices. She kept looking to make sure nobody followed us. As I was walking behind her, a thought came to my mind. I thought, "Oh no! What if she wants to harm me?" I was thinking, "Jesus, I might see you today." I really thought, "Oh no! I've heard of stories like this." I read Fox's Book of Martyrs.

But I still followed her. So I followed her and we went into this room and she locked the door. She said something that I'll never forget. I will come back to that later.

That's exactly what was happening in our text. We're going to look at 1 Peter 1:3-7. So for us, the reality as Western Christians, we may not have to give our life for the sake of Christ. But that's what was happening in the early church. Jesus had died. He had risen from the dead. He had come. Pentecost had happened and people were filled with the Holy Spirit. The new church was being born and people were following Jesus all over, becoming disciples of Him. But then there was a lot of persecution. So the early church had to decide. Is following Jesus, being a disciple in this new way of following God, is it worth my life? Is it worth my life? Some people were saying, "No! It's not worth my life!" and they

walked away. So Peter wrote this letter to encourage them, to say “Yes, it is worth following Jesus, even at the very cost of your life. It is worth it.”

For us, the pull of the world speaks loudly to us. The world pulled at us with the lure and temptation of sin and power and materialism and pleasure. And I believe the same words Peter penned thousands of years ago are still encouraging us today, that we would be full disciples of Jesus. So I encourage you to pull your Bibles back from the Pew and follow along with us.

It all begins with God. It all begins with God. It all begins with the Creator of the universe, wanting a relationship with us. He loves us so much that He wants to be with us. But because our sin separated us from God, we cannot be with God. He cannot have a relationship with us because He is a holy God. So He sacrificed His very own Son, to send Him on this earth to die and have a horrific death for us, to pay our sins. It's all because of God. It's a free gift, out of his grace and out of His mercy that He gives to us. It's nothing that we can do. We can't earn it. We can't bargain it. We can't rationalize it. We can't justify it. It's all God and because of that, we praise His name. We praise His name. He's given us a new birth into living hope. Hope is what gets us out of bed in difficult circumstances.

It's been said that humans can go four weeks without food, four days without water, four minutes without air, and four seconds without hope. Right? We need hope in order to keep going. There have been a lot of studies on the Holocaust and specifically in the concentration camps. Why did some prisoners just give up and die right away and why some prisoners were able to live through horrific measures but still make it to the other side? The reason was hope. The reason was hope. They believed that the Allies were winning and the Allies would rescue them soon. Then they could handle it. Just one more day, just one more day and we're going to be rescued. They could push through because they had hope. But on the opposite side, if they believed that the Germans were winning and this was all there was to it, they would just give up and immediately die.

But our hope is so much better. Our hope is alive. It's breathing. this hope that we have reminds us that our God is so amazing. He works good out of our bad, that God uses our brokenness and redeems them, that our God is a sovereign God. I can trust my future to Him and know that He is true to His promise, that He will never leave me nor forsake me. Our hope is alive. It's something that nobody can take away from us. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Last year, Sam and I missed Easter. We missed Easter because we got sick from Covid about three days before. So we missed it all. We missed Maundy

Thursday, Good Friday, Easter morning service. We missed Easter lunch with our family. Our neighbor was helping me. She was bringing groceries and dropping them off. She was telling me what her husband said. He is a self-proclaimed atheist. When he heard we were sick, he said, "Oh no! This is their holiday! They're missing their holiday!" I thought, "Yes!"

On the second Sunday of Easter, we are the Easter people. The Resurrection changes everything. It wasn't enough for Jesus to die, but He had to raise from the dead. He had to break off the chains of sin and the chains of death, in order for us to receive new life. The Resurrection changes everything. I want you to think about Good Friday; think about the cross; think about most of the male disciples weren't there. They were in hiding. They were afraid. They didn't want to risk their lives for this cause. But what happened after? What happened after the Resurrection, after Pentecost? They were filled with the Holy Spirit, with power and boldness. They boldly proclaimed the Good News. They willingly gave their life. All of them but one ended up being a martyr for the cause of Christ.

What was the difference? It was the Resurrection. The Resurrection changes everything. It's a foundation of our faith. It's a foundation of our life and this gives us an inheritance that cannot perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept for you.

I don't know if some of you have already maybe received physical inheritance from family members that have gone on, maybe it's property or monetary gifts. Now for me, from my grandmother and Sam's grandmothers, I have gotten jewelry and lots and lots of Christmas decorations. So that's been my inheritance. It's really sad, but some people fight over things, right? I remember when my grandma passed away. I went into her house and there was already stickies that all my cousins had put their names on all her China and things. Right? People fight for it. But why do we do that? Why do we hold on to things that are going to fade, things that we can't take with us, things that are going to perish? We have to hold onto things that bring us eternal value and that's people. That's people, bringing as many people to the front of the cross.

There was this young man that I met at one of the churches that I worked at. I was interviewing him for a volunteer position and he shared his story with me. He said, "Anna-Marie, I did everything right. I did everything society and my culture told me to do. I sacrificed my time. I sacrificed my energy and I got that elusive admittance into an Ivy League college. I graduated and I got a lucrative job. I bought the house and I bought the car of my dreams and I'm empty. And I'm empty. "Is this all there is to life?" he asked me. It wasn't until he started

volunteering, and then investing in kids' lives, and praying and encouraging them, encouraging them to be Christ followers every single day of their life, it wasn't until he started investing in these kids. He would invest in his finances. He would send them on mission trips. He gave him scholarships for camps. When he was investing his life and seeing these kids come to know Jesus, that's when he had fulfillment. That's when he had satisfaction.

So why do we hold on to things that will fade? Let's reach for the things; let's invest in the things of eternal value. "Who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation."<sup>1</sup> So when we see that "shield of God's power" phrase, we think, "Oh great! Is God going to protect me for hard things?" That's not what this passage is saying because we live in a broken, sinful world. So God's power is not going to protect us from war, from violence, from cancer. It's not going to do that. But instead, what it's talking about here is our souls are protected, our souls are sealed by God's power. That's why millions and millions of Christians have been willingly martyred throughout the generations because they said, "You could take away my stuff. You can even take away my body, but you cannot take away my soul because my soul has been bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus and it's not yours. It's God's." It's God's and He's the one that protects and shields our souls.

"In all this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Church, we need to look at trials differently. Instead of looking at trials and saying, "When are we going to get out of this trial? Hey God, almost, almost, let me clench my fist." Let's look at these trials and say, "God, what are You going to do in this trial to develop my character? What are You going to do in this trial to make me more like You?" Now, I've never seen gold refined by fire, but I know the process. Right? It's burning off the impurities. It's burning off the dross so that the gold could be in its pure form. What if God wants to do that in us? What if God wants to burn selfishness and greed and apathy off of us, so that we can be revealed to be more and more like Jesus. That's what Jesus wants us to do. That's what he wants to do in us.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 1:5

So let's look at our trials differently and when we enter a trial, say "God, how are you going to use this child to your glory? How are you going to use this, so that I can look more like you?"

So back to that room. I'm sitting there nervously looking at her bag, making sure there's no scary weapon in there that might bring harm to my body. She said something I've never forgotten. She said, "Anna-Marie, I hear you're a Christian and I want you to promise me that you will never pray for me." I said, "What?" No one's ever asked me that before. She said "I know of God and I know His power. I walked away from Him because I made a choice. I decided I wanted to do my own thing. I wanted to live a life that was clearly contrary to God's word. I'm having too much fun right now, but I know if you pray for me, I will be convicted and I will come back to God, but I'm not ready, so don't pray for me"

And you know what? I was saddened, but I also had respect for her because she counted the cost. She didn't want to make that cost at that moment. If we're honest, a lot of us, we live one foot in the world engaging in the things of the world and experiencing its pleasures, and one toe in the things of God. God says I have so much more for you. I have so much more for you, so let go. Let go of the things that you are holding so tightly onto because the good news is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that lives in you. It's the same power that convicts us of our sin. It's the same power that comforts us in our trials. It's the same power that gives us a Living Hope and it's the same power that will give us an inheritance with Him someday. All this is due to praise of His Holy Name. So let's let go, Church of the things that are temporary. Let's engage in the things that are eternal. We again say thank you, God, thank you God for the living hope we have in You. Amen.