

## THE LIVING HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION

1 Peter 1:3-9; 2 Peter 1:3-4

This morning I am speaking on the theme of *the living hope of the resurrection*. Last Sunday we raised our voices in the glorious proclamation that “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!” That was a proclamation pregnant with newness and positive implications, implications for a new life, new status, new hope, a new beginning, and new possibilities. Someone has said that:

**“When we tell ourselves, ‘I can never change,’ or ‘That will never happen,’ we presume too much and believe too little. In Jesus Christ God renders all of our final conclusions premature and all of our talk of determinism as simply bad faith. In Christ, God opens doors, brings resurrection, reveals possibilities, reclaims the lost, liberates the cursed and possessed, and changes the unchangeable.”**

Shortly before his death, playwright George Bernard Shaw was asked, “If you could live your life over and be anybody you’ve ever known, or any person from history, who would you choose to be?” Shaw replied, “I would choose to be the man George Bernard Shaw could have been, but never was.” His answer puts me in mind of what someone else said: “Of all our persecutors, the most haunting is the spectre of the person we might have been.”

We cannot live our life over again. Nor can we choose to be somebody else from history. But whether we have heretofore lived for better or for worse, we can now take this present time and the future as it comes to us replete with possibilities, and with the resurrected Christ as our source of life and power, we are now free to explore all of those exciting possibilities and potentialities which our Lord alone can open up to us. Peter has made some remarkable statements concerning what the resurrection of our Lord means for us:

**“In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you 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”** (1 Peter 1:3-5).

**“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires”** (2 Peter 1:3-4).

In Revelation 3:7 our Lord describes himself as “him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.” In other words, our resurrected Lord is holding doors of opportunity open for those who have faith in him. But for the faithless, such doors are irreversibly shut and opportunities are lost.

Then, in Revelation 5 we are confronted with the image of the Lamb of God, the Lamb who was slain but who has been raised to the right hand of the Father. He takes the mysterious scroll with the seven seals, the scroll of things to come, the scroll of destiny. Who can open such a scroll? Revelation 5:3 says that “no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.” But the saints gathered around the throne begin to sing:

**“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men from every tribe and language and people and nation ... Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!”**

It is Christ – and Christ alone – the resurrected Lamb of God, who takes the scroll and opens the first seal, thereby opening the door to the future consummation of the Kingdom of God. This is the very One who created the heavens and the earth, who raised up nations and brings nations down. He is the sovereign Lord of history who faithfully guides and guarantees the destiny of all who are willing to take up their cross and follow him. To all those who truly believe in Christ and in his resurrection, the miraculous becomes possible. Old natures are changed into new natures. Old creatures become new creations through the indwelling presence of the risen Saviour.

All of this is relevant to what Peter has written in his letters. This is the living hope of the resurrection of Jesus our Lord. It is only because of who Jesus is and what he has accomplished through his cross and glorious resurrection that doors of opportunity are open to us and that we have an inheritance that is virtually guaranteed. Now we can be what was closed to us before – new creatures. Now we can participate in the divine nature and escape worldly corruption. The possibilities are enormous! No wonder John wrote that:

**“Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure”** (1 John 3:2-3).

A few years ago the American Red Cross was gathering supplies, medicine, clothing, and food for the suffering people of Somalia. Inside one of the boxes that showed up at the collection depot was a letter. It said, “We have recently been converted to Christ, and because of our conversion we want to help. We won’t ever need these again. Can you use them for something?” Inside the box were several Ku Klux Klan sheets. The sheets had been cut down to strips and were eventually used to bandage the wounds of black persons in Somalia.

Could there ever be a more dramatic change? Sheets transformed from symbols of hatred and prejudice into bandages of love – all because of the power of the risen Christ to bring about a resurrection of the human soul and spirit.

That is the meaning of the passages we have before us this morning. What is Peter’s message in its simplest terms? As someone has so eloquently put it:

**The crucified Christ, in his glorious resurrection, has been vindicated by God with the result that human lostness has been reversed by divine power. There is now a wonderful newness in all its totality awaiting those who will humble themselves and make the journey, first to the foot of the cross, then to the empty tomb, and finally to the feet of the risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ himself. To such a pilgrim there opens up a new birth, a new life, a new status, new hope, and new possibilities.**

No wonder Peter's colleague, the apostle Paul, boldly and triumphantly proclaimed that, "If anyone is in Christ, he [she] is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). If God can transform hateful members of the Ku Klux Klan into loving philanthropists, if the same Lord can change the fire-breathing Saul of Tarsus from being the great persecutor of the early church into the Apostle Paul, the great champion of the church, if Christ can transform John Newton from slave trader to preacher of the Gospel and author of the hymn "Amazing Grace," what can the same risen Saviour do today for us? The answer is that he can take your life and mine and make them anew! The possibilities of change are everywhere to behold.

- Longfellow could take a nearly worthless sheet of paper, write a poem on it, and make it worth six thousand dollars. What beautiful poetry our Lord is able to write across the pages of our lives!
- Rockefeller could sign his name to a piece of paper and make it worth millions! Jesus has signed his own name in blood to the pardon that sets us free. And that is priceless!
- A craftsman can take raw material that is worth only a few dollars and make an artifact worth a hundred dollars. The Master Craftsman, Jesus Christ, can shape our lives into something of eternal worth.
- An artist can take a fifty cent piece of canvas, paint a picture on it, and make it worth a thousand dollars. Jesus can paint his own portrait on the canvass of your life or mine. Who can measure the worth of that? That is greater than ten thousand times ten thousand!

Today, as believers in the risen Christ, we have the opportunity to experience our own resurrection of the soul and transformation of life into something new and extraordinary. But this only happens when we invite Christ to take complete control of our lives. This morning I challenge us all to ask ourselves one question:

**"What could my life look like if Jesus had control of all of it – my thoughts, my speech, my will, my emotions, my appetites, and the affections of my heart?"**

There can be no more important question to take into the coming week. This week can be a week of honest dialogue with the risen Saviour who takes what is offered to him and brings to birth and full flower all of the latent possibilities that lie dormant in us. God sees it this way: We no longer have any private life of our own! We are joined to Christ in the sight of God! Our life has become an extension of Christ's life!

We died to all that Christ died to, and we have been raised to all that Christ was raised to! Let's not miss what our Lord has planned for us. Let us yield to him and fully embrace it! Let's begin the dialogue with God right now – in prayer.