

Have Some More!

1 -Living Hope - 1 Peter 1

Acts 2:29-36

Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19

1 Peter 1:1-25

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3rd Sunday of Easter

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Today our hearts and minds are overwhelmed. Two Sundays since the celebration of the Resurrection, in this Season of Resurrection, we are all in need of drawing strength and comfort from the deep abiding reality at the core of our faith: Jesus Christ is risen, has conquered death, hell and the grave. With him, as his pilgrim people, we will conquer as well and attain our true home in heaven in due time. But in the meantime we live amid suffering and pain.

Since Easter Sunday so much has happened. A royal couple got married. A Pope got beatified. A terrorist was brought to justice. Tornados worked destruction across Alabama. Floods threaten Memphis and along the Mississippi. Today I want to speak about our ultimate hope, arising out of this first Chapter of 1 Peter, a letter written from Rome to encourage suffering Churches of the Asia Minor, in what is currently North East Turkey near the Black Sea. A letter attributed to the Apostle Peter, either personally or under his authority, transcribed by another writer, Silvanus the faithful brother of Peter, who had seen Jesus' whole ministry. Over the next five weeks we will be probing this intense passionate letter, called, "the most condensed New Testament resume' of the Christian faith and of the conduct that it inspires." It is a pastoral letter, a letter of encouragement and hope in the face of suffering and trial, under persecution by Roman Emperor. It is addressed to these Gentile Churches.

Today is Mother's Day, the day we honor and remember and give thanks for our Mothers. So Happy Mother's Day to all of you Moms. As we start with 1 Peter, and in light of recent events, I want to begin with a memory of meals shared in the home of my wife Gayle's grandmother in Memphis, Mom McDaniel. Mom, as we all called her, was the quintessential mom and grandmom, a wonderful loving homemaker, a great nurturer, and a fabulous cook. Mom's cure for anything was food, wonderful home-cooked food. Any time we were at her table she filled our plates to overflowing. And after we had finished what was before us, she always extended the invitation, as she came around two or three times each with plates of vegetables and meats and potatoes extended right in front of our noses, "Have some more!" It was not really a question. It was not even an invitation. It was a command. Of course you will have some more. Whatever you are struggling with, have some more. You will feel better. You will get better.

Today our text in 1 Peter essentially says – “Have some more”. Have some more of the living abiding reality we have been given through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, through whom we have been given a Living Hope. Living Hope in the midst of whatever comes to us, that is what Peter calls us, commands us to. Have some more!

We always thought Mom looked like, smiled like, and generally had the happy demeanor of the Queen Mum, the mother of the current Queen Elizabeth of England. Smiling, assuring, comforting as the Queen Mum encouraged a war torn Great Britain throughout the Second World War, and encouraged a speech impediment afflicted husband, King George VI. She was a mother figure to a besieged nation. The events of recent weeks include the Royal Wedding of William, future King of England and Catherine Elizabeth, his commoner become Princess bride, by virtue of their vows in Westminster.

Now we Americans have a split-personality view about Royalty. We are glad to have left it back across the pond. Yet, as attested by the millions of Americans who got up at 3:00 am to watch the ceremony and pageantry, there is something in us that longs for, is lifted and ennobled by royalty. Peter is saying to these believers suffering in Asia Minor under Roman Emperor Nero’s persecutions, “You are royal citizens in the real Kingdom to which you are destined. So live in that awareness, that reality of the royalty that is yours, through your risen and glorified King and Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, of course Royal Wedding joy has been rapidly overshadowed in Alabama by the worst natural disaster in our state’s history through immensely destructive tornados that randomly destroyed life and livelihood, people and property. A parable of our response today, as those who know our real citizenship is elsewhere, is seen in the baptism of Alice Payne Ballard, daughter of Kevin and Reichenda Ballard, sister of Drake.

You see, this family had significant damage to their home in Pleasant Grove. They lost many of their possessions. But they are alive and grateful to God. Evidence of our family ties within South Highland is visible through the hospitality of Dr. Vance and Samantha Plumb, who themselves had severe damage to their home in Cahaba Heights area, and who also own a condominium in Vestavia that was vacant and about to be put out for rent. But when they heard, through Jim Truesdell, of the Ballard’s situation, Vance and Samantha offered it to them. And today the Ballard’s stand here to declare that, in spite of hardship and setback, they believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ their Lord and in the Holy Spirit. And they commit little Alice Payne to this God and to raising her within the covenant community that she may grow up mature in Christ. Turn with me now to the text from First Peter 1:1-2, as we learn to hope through suffering.

I

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood: May grace and peace be yours in abundance.”

Here is Peter’s greeting to the Churches. Grace and peace are common expressions in the Letters of the New Testament, especially those of the Apostle Paul. These letters of encouragement and instruction begin almost always with a call to receive what God came, lived and died and rose among us to give, the grace and peace of Jesus Christ. Here is a Trinitarian Greeting, referencing God as our Father, who has chosen us and destined us to live for him, who has made us holy or sanctified by the Spirit, all this by the great atoning gift of Jesus Christ. In the atoning rituals of the Jewish Temple on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the blood of the sacrificial lamb would be sprinkled, half over the Holy of Holies, that most sacred inner sanctum, the dwelling place of the Holy God, and half over the people, who were forgiven their sins for another year through this animal sacrifice.

II

Now, through the once-for-all time sacrifice of Jesus Christ we have been forgiven for eternity. His blood shed on the Cross, signified through the waters of baptism sprinkled upon us, gives us an utterly new identity, a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Continuing in First Peter, 1:3-7

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus 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, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 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.”

After his greeting, Peter offers a confident blessing to these suffering believers. That confidence is born not of bootstrap optimism, nor of their own innate strength or abilities, but solely of the resurrection of Jesus. Living hope through the Resurrection. Easter morning was like a Second Creation of the World as Jesus defeated the powers of death, and for 40 Days went in and out among the believers, instilling in them faith in this

utterly new resurrection reality that would hold them through their lives until he comes again in final completion of all things.

Nevertheless Peter recognizes that it is rough out there. “Now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials.” A group of us Southside clergy, Pastors, Priests, and Rabbi, at the Southside Interfaith Service of Remembrance, Thanksgiving and Hope last Wednesday night were asked the same two questions by a Fox news reporter: What did God have to do with the tornadoes? Why were some spared and some not? None of us took the bait to pretend a wise answer, other than to say God did not intend evil and was and is with us always, in the midst of our joys, in the midst of our suffering. Christian faith does not act as a magic potion to protect us from life’s misfortunes. Christian faith enables us to make it through, confident we do not go it alone. God is with us always. In this we rejoice.

III

Peter goes on to say just why and how this is so, verses 1:8-9.

“Although you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

What is real is often not what is seen but what is unseen. What is seen cannot be preserved unchanged. Our bodies change, age, and die in a few short years. Even mountains change and become plains over millions of years. Coastlines shrink and become seas. Change and decay in everything created is inevitable. But our salvation is joyfully anticipated, our joy is complete through what is unseen and eternal. “Although we have not seen him, we love him, we believe in him and rejoice.” And so we love him. “O how I love Jesus. O how I love Jesus. O how I love Jesus, because he first loved me.”

IV

Now who he is and what he has done did not start yesterday. Peter continues. Verses 1:10-12.

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven- things into which angels long to look!”

God has been at work through the ages. The prophets saw God at work in their situations. When they experienced exile and defeat, they saw that the story would not end there. God was at work through it all. Suffering is real and unavoidable. But the prophets saw suffering will result finally in glory. The shining shimmering radiant beauty of God and God's ways triumph. What was going on for 2000 years before Jesus was mysteriously and through suffering preparing the way for God's great Gift – the Good News of Jesus Christ, brought from heaven to us here. What came to us is magnificent beyond description. Even the angels were envious.

V

All that said, Peter moves now, in a major turn in his letter, telling these believers to get ready and get on with it. John Buck of our congregation has been going through intensive boot camp training down on the Gulf Coast with the Navy. I have heard a bit of his journey. It is intense, to say the least. John is still hanging in there, although the class of 40 with which he began has diminished through drop-out and failure to 14. Peter is urging these believers under persecution to get in shape mentally, physically and spiritually for what they must face, so they can hang in there. Verses 1:13-16.

“Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”

God's holy people; that is who we are. Not holy as “holier than thou.” Not holy as “Goodie two shoes.” But holy as, different, living by a different higher platinum standard set of values, because we are connected by grace, through death and resurrection, to God through Jesus Christ. Discipline yourselves. Be not conformed but transformed.

VI

Bottom line is: this earth is not your real home. You live here temporarily as aliens. Resident Aliens. Verses 1:17-21.

“If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God,

who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.”

In his play “No Exit”, Jean-Paul Sartre, the French Existentialist, gives his version of hell, two women and a man sentenced to eternal perdition. They must remain together in the same room forever, without sleep, without eyelids. Nothing can be hidden and nothing can be changed. This scenario led to Sarte’s famous line, “Hell is other people,” – and the moral of the play, “You are – your life, and nothing else.”

It is against this hell of hopelessness that the Gospel stands, where we are people of hope. Peter is telling these suffering believers, you have living hope because you have been ransomed. Your sin has been covered not by silver or gold or animal’s blood, but by Christ, the perfect lamb. And all this was planned and prepared from before the first big bang, before the first animal bleat or human cry. Through this Perfect One, you have come to trust God. Therefore you have a different homeland you can embrace by hope. In hope we live into our royal citizenship, even while we reside here with a green card, resident aliens in a foreign land, making the best of it while we are here, building, planting, yet always knowing we are destined for another land.

VII

How then should we live during our exile? Peter tells us, as we continue, 1:22-25,

“Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seeds, through the living and enduring word of God. For, ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ That word is the good news that was announced to you.”

In light of the cross and resurrection, as obedient children, we have mutual love, deep, authentic, genuine love one for one another. Love that lasts, because it is founded upon the Good News of God’s deep love. Love that went to hell itself for us. Here is our royal citizenship. We are kings and queens; we are princes and princesses of the utterly real Kingdom of God, completed in heaven, begun on earth, at work among us.

We have seen this new Kingdom at work in the caring responses of so many to the tornados. I saw it a few years ago on my trip to Kenya. We went to put in a water purification system, as the team we commission today is going again to do. While there I joined Rev. Simon, who preached here last year, in visiting one of his rural parishes. We walked through fields planted in potatoes and tomatoes, going from house to house and hut to hut, walking 18 miles, and ending in a larger, nicer home of one of the elders, where we all, Simon and I and all those we had visited along the way who were

physically able walked along with us. About 40 people crowded into this Elder's family living room for a service of Holy Communion.

After that moving service, this elder asked that we walk down the road to pray over and re-consecrate his rebuilt store, a little country general store. Only two months before, vandals had ransacked and burned his store to the ground. Now, helped by his neighbors and church members, he had rebuilt and repainted it. Now he was beginning anew, rising out of the ashes. We went down to the store. Fresh green paint still wet on the walls as we sang hymns, read scripture and offered prayers. His store and his life and that of his family was rising in living hope as they expressed deep faith in the Risen Living Lord. The Ballard's have expressed that same sort of faith, hope and love today in presenting Alice for baptism.

A great Scottish preacher, Arthur Gossip, said in a sermon he preached the Sunday after his wife died,

“To me the essence of the faith has always seemed a certain intrepidity of loyalty that can believe undaunted in the dark, and that still trusts God unshaken even when the evidence looks fairly damning.”

So I say to you, I invite you, in the words of Mom McDaniel, and of Peter, the Apostle, “Have some more!” Have some more of this faith hope and love. Have some more of this confidence in God, trust in God, reliance on God. Have some more of this living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. One day it will all become clear for the whole universe. But for those united in Christ through his death and resurrection, that new day has already dawned. Have some more!

Prayer – Ever so, help us to do O Lord. Gratn that we may live in resurrection hope more and more until we see you face to face.

References – Please refer to Outline and daily scripture reading and reflection guide found in the insert of May 8th bulletin.