

April 16, 2023

1 Peter 1:3-9

“Born Again To A Living Hope!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Last month (March 27, 2023), Jane Herz wrote an article for the *New York Post* titled: *You can now experience how death feels through virtual reality*. The article states:

This new art exhibit is to die for. An Australian artist is bringing the experience of death to life via a participatory virtual reality simulator, showing people what it could be like as you're dying. Artist Shaun Gladwell's show, "Passing Electrical Storms," at Melbourne's National Gallery of Victoria can conjure the process of dying through "medical technologies," according to the official description. "At once meditative and unsettling, this interactive work guides participants through a simulated de-escalation of life, from cardiac arrest to brain death," reads the exhibit's outline on the gallery site. Gladwell described the experience as "moving away from yourself and then floating off into the giant universe" in an interview with the Australian this week. "By simulating death as an experience in its last few minutes, it's a meditation on the ephemerality [shortness] of individual life," Gladwell told the outlet. "For me, it's not all gloomy but a spectrum of colors and moods."

And there you have it. The hope of the unbeliever is nothing but a guess - a "floating off into the giant universe ... not all gloomy but a spectrum of colors and moods." Now contrast that sentimentality with the forceful words of our epistle lesson for this morning:

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, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Born Again To A Living Hope! Born again "through the living and abiding word of God (2 Pet. 2:23)." Born again through holy baptism which "now saves you (2 Pet. 3:21)." Again, Peter writes: "he has called us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection." These are the words of an apostle who heard with his own ears the very words of Jesus. This apostle saw with his own eyes the resurrected Lord! This is the saying of an apostle who had been baptized. This is not a "... well I hope so." This is the certain anticipation of one who not only believed in Jesus, but was alive in the consideration about all that was to come in him. It's more than a guess. It's more than a spectrum of colors and moods! It is a looking forward to everything that is in Jesus. It is what we sing: "Heaven is my home!"

Like Peter we have been **Born Again To A Living Hope!** We have heard the living and abiding word. The waters of holy baptism have washed away all that would prevent us from being with Jesus in heaven forever. We have died and risen with Christ. All the filth of what we think, say, and do, all of our unholiness that would keep us from the Holy One, and everything that has made us unclean has been removed. We are counted clean. Jesus has given us his holiness. The filth that so haunts us day after day has been entirely removed. And, with that, a great flood of hope gushes within us.

All of this hope is rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! Peter writes in the twenty-fifth chapter of the book of Acts: "... we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." Don't forget that this is the same Peter who was a complete mess at the trial, crucifixion, and death of Jesus.

Peter had lost all hope. The Lord Jesus had warned him and the other apostles that they would all fall away (Mark 14:27). And the shepherd was struck and the sheep scattered. And we are told in the Scripture that Peter found himself in the courtyard where the religious leaders of Israel were meeting to convict Jesus and put him to death. And we remember that Peter denied Jesus three times. The rooster crowed. And the gospel of Luke records: "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:61-62)." After the crucifixion, and even after Mary Magdalene testified to him that she had seen the Lord, and after Peter had run to see the empty tomb, we find Peter and the other disciples behind locked doors for fear of the Jews.

All of this, and more, leads the Jewish theologian and historian Pinchas Lapide to comment on the transformation of Peter and the other apostles in the following way:

This scared, frightened band of the apostles, which was just about to throw away everything in order to flee in despair to Galilee; when these peasants, shepherds, and fishermen, who betrayed and denied their master and then failed him miserably, suddenly could be changed overnight into a confident mission society, convinced of salvation and able to work with much more success after Easter than before Easter, then no vision or hallucination is sufficient to explain such a revolutionary transformation.

And that's the truth! They saw the resurrected Lord! It changed everything! As J. P. Moreland writes, "The disciples had nothing to gain by lying and starting a new religion. They faced hardship, ridicule, hostility, and martyr's deaths. In light of this, they could have never sustained such unwavering motivation if they knew that what they were preaching was a lie."

Consider also that in the resurrection of Jesus you have been raised to faith and newness of life. That's the work of the Holy Spirit in the means of grace! That's a miracle - that you and I believe any of these things - and further proof that Jesus is alive. As Jesus says in our gospel lesson, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." If we, who once were spiritually dead, have now been raised to believe that Jesus died and rose, so that we might have the forgiveness of sins and life, then we also are a testimony to the power of the gospel of resurrection. Having been **Born Again To A Living Hope** the whole world should consider that there really is something astounding going on here.

So what is truly real to us? The living hope, that we have from Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection from the dead, tells us something about our now and forever! It means that we have a future that isn't

worth comparing to what is now. We have the anticipation that today will give way to a forever and glorious tomorrow. And, in our consideration of this forever and glorious tomorrow, we have the strength to persevere in our today, and whatever today might bring. Keep in mind that what we have is “a living hope.” It is living in us now by faith, and we excitedly hope for that which is yet to be seen with our own eyes. Our hearts should yearn within us! And when we finally see with our own, forever eyes, then faith and hope will have been fulfilled in the highest!

The inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, which is currently being kept in heaven for us, will finally be within the grasp of our forever hands. And that inheritance is to, first and foremost, have the true and only God who loves us with an everlasting love. He is our everything. And he, who is everything, brings all good things for he is pure goodness. Let us then persevere in the things that we must endure in this life, for they are “light and momentary afflictions” that are merely “gaining for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” And in the meantime, let us take great comfort in knowing what Peter writes to us, that by God’s power, we “are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” And though we are grieved by various trials, these only come to test and strengthen our faith.

Born Again To A Living Hope! Our Lord Jesus has risen from the dead! In him we have the forgiveness of all our sins. In him we have been brought from death to life, now by faith, and in the end a new body and a forever destination in the glorious face of our Lord. This truly is a miracle! As Peter says in the close of our epistle lesson: “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.”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott