

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

March 29/30, 2008

“Living Hope” based on 1 Peter 1:3-9

I saw something on the History Channel a month or so ago about explorers. And when I read today's second lesson something I saw came to mind. It seems that one of the first European explorers to round the tip of South America called that tip of land the “Cape of Storms” because of the stormy weather he encountered there. But some years later, Vasco da Gama who went the same way changed that name to the “Cape of Good Hope.” He didn't change it because the weather had gotten any better. It was still stormy. He changed it because he was on his way to India and rounding that tip meant he was going the right way. And that gave him, as he said, “good hope.”

You know, in a way, life is a lot like that. For some who only see the stormy weather of life, life is indeed a life of storms. But for others, for those who can see past the storms to their ultimate destination, life is a life of good hope.

In today's second lesson, Peter tells us what can and does make the difference between a life of storms and a life of good hope. He says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Now, according to Webster's dictionary, “hope” is defined as “a desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment.” And so, Peter says, this “desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment” is a gift from God given to all who believe because of His great mercy. It's not something that we can muster up from within as if all that were necessary for us to have hope is simply to be more positive about the future. Now, I'm not saying we shouldn't be positive about the future – in fact, I think all of us probably would be better off if we were. But simply being positive doesn't give us the kind of hope Peter is talking about because that hope is not really based on anything other than our desire. Nor is it a hope based on what we can or will do. Rather it's a hope that based on something that God has already done and on something He promises to do for us and in us and through us for the sake of His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And so, Peter says, this hope is a “living hope”. In the King James Version, it's called “lively hope.” It has a life of its own, it's vital and active. It's not a hope that fades or wanes or is lost by circumstance. Let's face it, some times some hope can fade – especially when things seem against us, especially when circumstances are such that it looks like what we desire can never be. But not so with this hope because this hope comes from God. It's a living, lively hope, and thus it's a hope that can endure, that can stand the test of time, that doesn't depend on circumstance.

This hope, Peter concludes, is a hope that comes only through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You see, the resurrection which we celebrated again just last week is the very reason why we can have hope today. For the resurrection proves that with God nothing is

impossible. For if death itself was not the end for Jesus then it will not be the end for any of us who believe and trust in him either. And if Jesus rose from the dead then all those who believe in and follow him will rise as well – not just at the end of time but every day as the “old man” is put to death and the “new man” in Christ arises. No single event in the history of mankind has or can give hope like the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It's said that the Rev. Peter Flammig once told the story of Easter Island as an introduction to a sermon entitled, “Easter Is Not An Island.” Easter Island, he said, is a small spot of volcanic ground in the south Pacific about thirteen miles long and about seven miles wide. It lies about 2,000 miles off the coast of Chile. It was named Easter Island because it was discovered by a Dutch navigator on Easter Sunday in 1722. Considerable speculation surrounds its original inhabitants largely because of the gigantic statues and the mysterious tablets that were found there. And what makes it all the more intriguing is that it looks like whoever was working on all that suddenly just dropped everything and left the island. Flammig went on to say that we Christians are often tempted to look back on the first Easter in the same way – interesting perhaps and certainly mysterious but ancient history that has no real implication for our day and age. But it ought not be so, he said. For early Christians, Easter was the very present revelation of God's continuing grace and power in their lives. And so it should be for us as well. Such a revelation, he concluded, should be the centerpiece not only of our continuing faith but also of our continuing hope.

How about us? Is the resurrection of Jesus Christ the centerpiece of our faith and our hope? As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15, “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith ... if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” “But,” he goes on to say, “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.” And so our faith and our hope are not in vain.

If our faith and our hope are in Christ, we will never be discouraged and our desire that is accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment will never disappoint, for God who raised Christ from the dead is still with us and His promise to never leave us nor forsake us is still sure. His blessings of forgiveness and life and salvation are still ours by grace through faith and if we remain faithful until the end we shall see their fulfillment in heaven.

In what are we putting our hope? Is it in ourselves? Is it in others? Is it in what you can do or in what others can do for you? Is it in the things of this world? Or is it in Christ and in what he has done and will do for you in this life and the next?

If it is in Christ, if it's his resurrection that is the basis for your hope, then you will never fear. Indeed, your life can and will turn from a “life of storms” into a “life of good hope”.

May God grant this to us all for the sake of Jesus Christ, our risen and reigning Lord and Savior. Amen.