

1 Peter 1:3-9—Born again to a Living Hope

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Sermon notes

In the Sundays after Easter our worship themes often take us to the meaning of the resurrection for us in our daily life. This Epistle reading from 1 Peter speaks of a lively hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

We are meeting electronically because of a virus no one can see. Whose fault is that? According to an op-ed in the New York Times three weeks ago, Christians are to blame. The reasoning goes like this. Many Christians were instrumental in electing Donald Trump. According to the op-ed writer, Donald Trump denies science. If Donald Trump respected science he would have taken steps to block the virus from coming to the USA. Someone at the New York Times agreed with the young woman who wrote the op-ed enough to print her article. The logic seems to be very faulty. But, people have been slandering and wrongly blaming Christians long before this op-ed writer. Nero blamed Christians for the Great Fire of Rome in 64 AD. There will likely be even more of it in the future.

1 Peter comes from a time when the persecution of Christians is beginning. It is not yet coming against them physically, but is applying subtle pressures against them. There is a lot in 1 Peter about bearing up under such things and even having hope despite these things. As out of place as it might seem, hardships are necessary for the refining of our faith. The author of 1 Peter writes to help the recipients of his five short chapters to have a firm and confident hope that what they see around them is not the final word, but rather they have been born anew to a lively hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

To us the word “hope” does not give much assurance. We hope it does not rain on a day we need dry weather. We hope we do not contract the COVID virus. We have no actual control over these and other things. In these cases we make a wish. But, in the Bible hope is something certain. It is called hope only because we still wait for its fulfillment when Jesus comes again. It is promised and God’s promises are sure. The hope of eternal life is sure and certain, but it is not yet fully ours to enjoy.

Hope is important for life even here and now. A quotation in a Bible dictionary article on “hope” says where there is no hope death follows. Here is an example of that. A member of a previous congregation had been drafted into the German Army at age 14. By age 16 he was a prisoner of war in Siberia. He was one of forty people who lived in a railway boxcar when not doing labor as prisoners. Most were not many years older than he and had some optimism life would continue one day. But, a man about 40 saw no hope, and he soon died. Hope, even if it was for life now, made that much difference.

Baptism is important in 1 Peter. Later, in 3:21 there is mention that Noah and his family were brought safely through the waters of the flood. Then it says baptism is like that in that we are

saved by baptism, not as washing dirt off of our bodies, but the appeal of a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus. (It is not as if we can be saved through baptism, or through faith. The New Testament does say the same benefits that come through one also come through the other. Both baptism and faith are part of the same thing. In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* Martin Luther said God adds signs to faith because we are so slow to believe God's promises. The signs are not empty symbols, but effect what they promise.) But chapter 1 does not say we have been born again through baptism. Based on Titus 3 we might expect that. Rather it speaks of being born again through the Word of God preached to us. That Word of God presents Jesus Whose death and resurrection rescue us from the penalty of our sins. (See vv. 23-25)

Something similar occurs in verse 2 just outside our text that helps us understand more about why God cares for us to give us a lively hope. It says we are sprinkled with the blood of Christ. I wish I had a nickel for every time I wanted that to be a reference to baptism. But, it is a reference to a sprinkling with blood from the Old Testament in Exodus 24:6-8. (Some versions assume you will not understand the importance of that sprinkling and may change sprinkled to a word like "cleansed.") "And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.' And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.'"

"Sprinkling with blood, according to the understanding of people at the time of Exodus, makes the parties to be the equivalent of blood kinsmen, and with that, establishes the most intimate connection possible." (*Die Bibel mit Erklärungen, Evangelische Haupt—Bibelgesellschaft zu Berlin*, 1993, notes on 24:8. Translated.) While Jesus quoted v. 8 when He gave the Lord's Supper, the reference here means our faith in Christ applies the blood of Christ to us for the forgiveness of our sins. All that stood against us is cancelled, and we have a lively hope that is certain through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Jaroslav Pelikan died in 2006 at age 82. He was a Lutheran clergyman and theologian most of his life, and taught at Yale University. He joined the Greek Orthodox Church eight years before his death from lung cancer. When he died his last words reflect the hope we Christians have because of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead. "If Christ is raised from the dead, nothing else matters. If Christ is not raised from the dead, nothing else matters." We are reborn to a lively hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead."