

“Hope Blossoms”

1 Peter 1:3-9
First Sunday of Advent - Hope

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Communion Meditation

As we gather around the Lord's Table may we prepare ourselves by considering this reading we have heard from 1 Peter and particularly Peter, who wrote it.

Peter and his brother Andrew lived in the same region as Jesus. They met Jesus around the time John the Baptist was drawing attention to the coming Messiah.

Andrew and Peter were among the first people called by Jesus to follow him. Peter's birth name was Simon, but Jesus gave him the new name, Peter, which means 'rock'.

The re-naming indicated that upon joining Jesus a person received a new identity.

Not just like in the movies where someone goes into the witness protection program and receives a new identity in a new town with a new vocation.

Rather, a new person begins to reside in the old person, a new psychology grows.

Now Peter was a devout Jew and believed in God's Messiah (the Christ) who would deliver the people of God to be God's people on Earth; this belief was a natural part of his worldview when he met Jesus and he came to believe Jesus was the Messiah (the Christ).

After living with Jesus for three years Peter had this natural belief tested.

Up until that time Peter saw and touched many miracles performed by Jesus that were compelling evidence Jesus was who he claimed to be: the Son of God, God's Messiah.

But then the test came.

Peter was put into a situation whereby Jesus was taken into custody with a certain outcome of crucifixion. Peter's situation was such that he was challenged as being with Jesus and therefore deserving of the same punishment about to come upon Jesus.

Peter denied he followed Jesus. Challenged again, Peter denied, with an oath, that he was with Jesus. Challenged a third time, Peter denied, with cursing, that he even knew Jesus.

Peter's belief in Jesus as Christ (& friend) failed the test. His belief was a natural part of his worldview; he had grown up with it; but when his person was put in ultimate danger he denied the concreteness of the belief. Peter gave up on Jesus.

Thankfully, Jesus did not give up on Peter.

After rising from the dead and presenting the ultimate proof as to his claim: Son of God; Messiah, Jesus confronted Peter with a threefold request of Peter's allegiance to him.

Peter passed the test, his natural belief had become supernatural. How?

What does Peter say: **In his great mercy** (quite right Peter, mercy it is exactly!) **God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us new birth** – Peter uses a Greek word: anagenesis; ana means again, genesis means genesis; the strict English translation is regeneration: not a new identity in the witness protection program; but a new person transforming the old person.

Peter continues: . . . **into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.** Peter's regeneration took place as a result of the death and resurrection of Jesus who, as demonstrated in his death and resurrection, is in fact the Christ, God's Messiah.

The death and resurrection of Jesus, symbolized and sacramentally represented at the Lord's Table, generated a 'beyond time and space shock wave' that regenerates everyone who turns to Jesus Christ in faith and through baptism and participation at this Table submits to his universal reign as sovereign authority and supreme Judge.

Peter tell us Christian regeneration creates a **living hope . . . an inheritance kept in heaven** (a place in the kingdom of Christ) . . . **until the coming of salvation . . . when** the veil currently between heaven and earth, a veil masking our view of realities in heaven is removed and **Jesus Christ is revealed.**

Why does Peter call it a **living hope**?

First, because of the regeneration emanating from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This hope is not a theology, an abstract idea, personal inclination or emotion; it is an independent power that takes hold of believers in Jesus Christ. I suppose one could try and repress it, ignore it, not nurture it. But why? What else in the universe can compare with this living hope?

We know from the evidence the hope is alive. The hope, beyond time and space, first appeared, according to what the Bible tells us in Hebrews chapter 11, with Abel, the first recorded martyr and murder victim in human history. We are told in Hebrews 11, the faith of Abel, which is generated from the same place as hope (faith, hope and love), still speaks, even though he is dead.

You see, something powerful was released into our world upon the death and resurrection of Jesus. It stretches all the way back to Abel and forward to us and beyond. The living hope is still alive and effecting people. People all around the world are still putting their life on the line because of faith in God, the same faith as Abel's.

The evidence is there. Some 4,000 years of history is recorded in Hebrews 11 and since then 2,000 more years of history have been added. Around 6,000 years of history – all of the record of human civilization that produced records – and throughout those years a constant stream of believers in God who had this hope Peter refers to.

This is why Peter can claim it is a **living hope.** Not just a personal introspective inclination in Peter's life (our yours or mine) but something much, much more significant.

As Peter explains in the rest of his letter this living hope orientates the Jesus follower into a different way of living in this world, a way that leads to the genuine renewing of God's Creation. It is a hope worth living and dying for. It is why we now celebrate the Lord's Table.

The Hebrews 11 account refers to a **so great a cloud of witnesses.**

The **cloud** surrounds and towers around us this morning. It pulsates with living hope.

As we eat and drink here at the Lord's Table, the new person we are and the great cloud of witnesses calls us to reaffirm our whole orientation toward Jesus Christ and his Kingdom. It is the hope beyond all hopes to live for. Amen.