

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. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 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.

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

We are Easter people.

More than anything else, that should be true for each and every one of God's children. To be Easter people doesn't simply mean that we love to sing the hymns that rejoice in the good news of the resurrection, although Easter people do love to sing those hymns, like *I Know that My Redeemer Lives, He's Risen, He's Risen, Christ Jesus the Lord*; or *Jesus Christ is Risen Today*. We love these hymns, for they praise God for the blessings that are ours in the Saviour who died and rose again.

Being Easter people doesn't mean that we like seeing the church decorated with lilies. It doesn't mean that we like sunrise services or that we think it would be good to come together each week to share a wonderful breakfast as we typically do on Easter Sunday.

No, being Easter people means living each day in the light of the resurrection. Every Sunday is a 'little Easter'. Each day is a new day of life in Christ, too. To be Easter people is to be like St. Paul, who looked at all he thought was important, and yet says: *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,* (Philippians 3:7-10 - ESV) To be Easter people is to live in the new life we have as the baptized children of God. God's inspired Word reminds us: *We were buried therefore with [Christ] by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* (Romans 6:4 - ESV)

We are Easter people, because of all our loving God has done, is doing, and will do for us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter tells us in our text today: *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.* And, dear people loved by God, we *need* to be an Easter people. We need the comfort, encouragement and strength that flows from the assurance that Jesus lives, and we have life with Him and through Him. We need Easter's hope and life as we struggle on in this world, until we obtain that *salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

Thankfully, even in all the uncertainty, pain and sorrow of this world, God's Easter people have a glorious, abiding and living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That living hope is far greater than the hurts, the problems, and the cares of this world. Through faith in the crucified, risen, living and ascended Christ we have already won the victory, even as we struggle on to the great and glorious day, when we *[obtain] the outcome of [our] faith, the salvation of [our] souls.*

Our text today comes from Peter's first letter, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit *to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.* (1 Peter 1:1 - NASB) He writes to comfort and encourage these new converts to the faith, who live as aliens in the world. Many of them were being persecuted and hated for their confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. Suffering is the lot of all people in this sinful world. For the Easter people of God, the sufferings that we experience can be worse, because the devil and the world around us want to use this suffering to destroy the faith and hope we have in the living Christ.

And how we need this hope! We need that hope so much right now when we drive through the city, and see everything shuttered and closed. We wonder if businesses will reopen or if people who have been temporarily laid off will suddenly find themselves without a job. We wonder when it will be safe to go out again. We have people with loved ones in the hospital who are frustrated that they are unable to visit and to show their love and support for them at this time. We may appreciate the fact that we can fill our gas tank for half of what we did just a few months ago. Yet we also know that the unrealistically low prices have a negative impact on our economy. We read the paper, and the number of COVID cases continues to increase. Now, with meat processing plants being affected by the virus, we may start to wonder what food supplies will be like. While most of us are simply frustrated and struggling with cabin fever, we still wonder what the future will bring.

If suffering, pain and disaster only ever came upon the unbelievers of our world, we would probably see these things with a sense of smug satisfaction, that those people are 'getting what they deserve'. If you are tempted to feel that way, just remember that we are all sinners, and we deserve nothing from God, except His wrath and punishment. But suffering isn't reserved for unbelievers. Peter is writing to Christians, encouraging them to hold fast to their hope in Christ in the midst of all that they are suffering in this world. He wants us to be Easter people, knowing that the hope we have in Christ is far greater than the hurts of our lives.

While our COVID fears may head the list right now, we know all too well that the hurts of our lives are abundant. While there are the days when we jump out of bed and think to ourselves that it's good to be alive, there are also the days when our lives seem so devoid and empty of joy that we might even feel that there is little reason to go on living. Life is full of problems: there are bills to pay, broken relationships to mend, and all those things that just drag us down. Trouble and hardship seem to surround us, and we have no way to get away from it.

God's people also face the suffering that comes only because we are Easter people. Like those early Christians, we often find ourselves being mocked and ridiculed for our faith. In many parts of the world, Christians are dying because of their confession of Christ. Even if we are not dying, don't we feel that we are a bit like aliens in our world today? In many ways we just don't fit in, and many don't want us to be included. The COVID experience right now has shed some light on this. In some US jurisdictions, the rules for churches have been more restrictive than they are for other secular gatherings. We're not talking about those who have defied the rules. We, as God's people must obey the civil authorities. But some authorities are indeed persecuting Christians, establishing rules that apply only to them.

All this can seem so confusing. If God loves us, why do we still have the struggles we experience in this world? Why are we hated by others around us? Why do our bodies still waste away from the ravages of diseases like cancer? Why is He letting this pandemic continue? It can make us feel a bit like Thomas in our Gospel lesson: ***"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."*** (John 20:25 - ESV)

Thankfully, faith sees what God has done for us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Easter people, we have this living hope that is greater than our hurts. Jesus lives, and that changes everything. Peter looks at the sufferings of life and at all we may endure, even as Easter people, and says: ***In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*** God can use the suffering of our life for a glorious purpose: to reveal to us the genuineness of our faith. Luther said: ***"God afflicts us in this way in order that our faith may be proved and made manifest before the world, with the result that others are attracted to the faith and we are praised and extolled. For God will praise, extol, and honor us as we praise Him. Then the false hypocrites, who do not approach the cross and adversities in the proper way, will necessarily be put to shame."*** (LW, vol. 30:17)

We are Easter people. In that hope, we know that God's grace is greater than our troubles; that our hope is far greater than our hurts. I like the note on this section in *The Lutheran Study Bible*: ***"As you read 1 Peter, pray for your brothers and sisters who face suffering. Count it all joy that your Lord Jesus Christ suffered all pain and shame in order to redeem you and all who call upon Him. As He gives you strength, rejoice in your sufferings, knowing that you share in the sufferings of Christ. As with Jesus, the sufferings you face must give way to the subsequent glories God will reveal in you."*** (The Lutheran Study Bible p. 2147) .

Suffering does give way to glory. We see that in the events of Good Friday and Easter, as our loving Saviour endures the suffering of the cross for us. But that suffering gives way to the glory of His resurrection on Easter morning. In this confidence, the hymn writer declares: ***I know that my Redeemer lives! What comfort this sweet sentence gives. He lives, He lives, who once was dead. He lives, my ever-living head*** (LSB 461, st. 1) Jesus lives, and that means our sins are forgiven. Jesus lives, and that means everything will turn out all right in the end. Think of life as a book, with God as the author, Christ as the hero, and ourselves as characters in the story. Here we are, still in the middle of the book, with chapters we still must live. Some of those

chapters hold good things that will make us glad; some will make us sad. There will be joy and there will be trouble in our lives before the story is finished. As characters in the story, we have no idea how things are going to turn out. But in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God reveals the denouement; He shows us how all things come together. We see that Christ, our hero, triumphs over the devil who causes all the grief and trouble and pain of our lives. And by faith we share in the victory of Christ. That is why we are Easter people. This is why we have hope. Jesus lives! And through faith in Him, you will ***obtain the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*** Amen.