

“Hope big!” 1Peter 1:3-9

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.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

We have spoken from time to time about universal experiences of the entire humanity, like the knowledge that something, or someone higher exists, or knowledge about our accountability, as it is literally written on our hearts.

Or about the brokenness of this world, when everyone agrees that there is so much wrong around us. Today I invite you to reflect on one more truly universal human experience, and it is – on hope. Hope...

In a way, we could say that hope is the flipside of the knowledge that something is deeply wrong with our world. Hope is about good things that we expect to happen to us or to others, despite what the world around us is like. Our hopes testify that we know deep in our hearts that things could and should be better.

What are you hoping for? Everyone is hoping for something. We spend our days hoping for something good, needed, satisfying, and our hopes give us power to endure, power to continue, power to not give up. Our hopes are the source that gives us power to meet tomorrow.

We all are hoping for something, but the problem is that most of our hopes never turn out in a way we are hoping they will. We may hope to find our spouse, the best friend for life. It may never happen.

Or it may happen and then something goes wrong and ... marriage fails. Or our relationships are only a shade of what we were hoping for. Or, they may turn out to be something we were not hoping for at all, with too much misery.

We may hope that if we do our bit, our children will grow up in a way we raise them. It may never happen. Despite all our efforts they may turn away from what is the most important for us, Jesus Christ, and go on messing up their lives and we are left to watch it and to suffer for them.

We may hope that if we work hard and are honest, do our best, good things will happen, and we'll be able to enjoy the fruits of our work. It may never happen. Or all our hard work can be abused and we are left with nothing. Or we can hope to find better work only to find ourselves unemployed with all the consequences, or working somewhere under ever worse conditions.

Or we can put our heart in our business hoping for financial security and freedom, and then something outside of our control happens and years of effort are worth nothing. Or it could be that our work or business just demands from us so much that there is no freedom, nor time to enjoy the fruits of our work.

We may hope that we and our loved ones will have good health despite the odds, and it may never happen. Accidents come, sicknesses come, some of them terminal, and then we are left to hope that medicine will help and will extend lives at least for a while.

Sometimes it doesn't happen, and sometimes medicine can only delay death and extend suffering. We should read the book of Ecclesiastes, written by the wisest person who ever lived, and one of the richest people who ever lived.

What did he write at the end of his life? Having achieved and experienced almost everything there is to be achieved and experienced, what did He conclude? Even if you seemingly manage to fulfill all your earthly hopes...

... even if you manage to achieve what almost no one else has, at the end you need to recognize that all of it is vanity, it never delivers for you what you long for deep in your heart, and then at the end death halts all your hopes.

But we all do hope. We hope for the best. We firmly believe that things could be better. Why do we do this? For hope is a powerful thing. Hope can fill our life with meaning. Hope can give us energy.

It changes our lives. It enables us to do things which we couldn't do otherwise. If we have a hope, then we lead our lives striving for something, for something important, something good that is to come, instead of simply existing.

The disciples of Jesus had their hopes, too. Theirs were rather big hopes, rather ambitious ones. They believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah and that He would establish His Kingdom, and then... they will be able to enjoy the glory.

These hopes enabled them to leave their previous lives and to faithfully follow their teacher and Lord. They were with Jesus for a good three years. Inspired by their hopes. And then the day came. Not the day they were hoping for.

The worst day for Jesus' disciples. The day of Jesus' crucifixion. On that cross together with Jesus Roman soldiers also crucified all the hopes of Jesus' disciples. Their Teacher, their Master, their hopes for better life were dead, gone, perished.

Their hopes were shattered, their lives were left empty and meaningless, now being filled with fear and despair. There was no energy, no joy left for them. They had invested so much in this hope – three years! – and now it is gone.

We all experience moments like this, probably not as dramatic, but we all can relate to the experience of shattered hopes. But then came the day of resurrection. The day when hopes of Jesus' disciples were transformed beyond their expectations.

What happened? Before Jesus' crucifixion, they were hoping for something for this life. For good things. But as Paul, the apostle writes – if we as Christians hope in Christ in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Everything changed after the resurrection. Seeing the risen Jesus, in a resurrected body standing among them, gave them a glimpse of what is to come. Suddenly the disciples realized that what they had been hoping for was so insignificant.

Their previous hopes were nothing compared with the reality that dawned on them as the risen Jesus stood among them. It was like they had been living in darkness and hoping for a candle to be lit, and suddenly there was sun rising.

There was the fable about two frogs; one was a frog that lived in a well, and the other lived in an ocean. They met and seeing where the well's frog lived, the ocean's frog invited her to come to the ocean.

"Come, for it will be much better. Much more spacious. The ocean is much bigger than your well." The well's frog tried to find out what exactly to hope for. "How big is it? Like a big well? No? Like two wells together? No? Like three wells?"

Before the resurrection, Jesus' disciples had hopes like the well's frog. They couldn't imagine what heavenly hopes await them in Jesus. And we often struggle with the same. We hope too small, we limit our hopes to what we know and understand.

After the resurrection, the disciples saw the glimpse of the ocean to come. It changed everything. They had been hoping that they may get some good years before they die, some glory, now suddenly they saw that death is not the end.

Jesus had overcome death, and had opened for them the doors to eternal life. Everlasting life. In New Creation. Before they had their own small hopes, for they didn't even know what exactly to hope for.

After Jesus' resurrection they knew exactly what to expect, what Jesus had gone to prepare for them, what awaits them when this life is over. Do you remember how this new hope changed their lives?

This hope turned them into fearless witnesses of Jesus' death and resurrection. Nothing and nobody could stop them from proclaiming the good news. They went around testifying that Jesus has risen and that through Him forgiveness of sins and eternal life in God's Kingdom is offered and given to everyone [!] who desires to receive this precious gift of God.

Do you know what happened with the apostles? With these dozen men who were hopeless and scared were hiding behind the locked doors after Jesus was crucified? They all, except John, were executed, violently murdered.

Why? Because they just wouldn't stop telling people what they had seen and experienced and what a wonderful hope, what a wonderful inheritance God has prepared in His Kingdom for all His beloved. For them. For you.

These men gladly accepted death, death on the cross, death by stoning, death by beating, and so on. How terrible! How could they endure all of this? You may have heard the story of Peter. When he was sentenced to be crucified, he said he is not worthy to die the death His Lord Jesus died, so he asked to be crucified upside down. How is this even possible to have such courage? Because of their hope.

And you know what, you have exactly the same hope. You, each of you have exactly this same hope. For as Peter wrote, God the Father has caused you to be born again by uniting you with Jesus by means of His Holy Spirit. Yes, He did it. For you.

Now you are born again to this living hope, to this inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. And this is not some vague hope in something that may, or may not come true, as with all the other our hopes.

This is a certain, firm, unshakable, imperishable hope. Everything can change, this world will perish, but not this hope. It remains. In this we rejoice. This is the source of our power, our joy, our energy, our peace, our gladness. This hope like a powerful magnet pulls us through this life towards that day when it will come true.

What Peter the apostle wrote was addressed to all the brothers and sisters in Christ. This letter is for everyone whom the Father has given a new birth by His Spirit. It is addressed to everyone who loves Jesus even if you haven't seen Him.

It is addressed to everyone who hasn't seen Jesus, but still rejoice in what He has done, as Peter put it – with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. In the midst of our challenges and griefs Peter reminds us about something life changing.

He reminds you about this hope which is prepared for you and for now hidden in heavens with Jesus, and which you will most certainly receive fully when Jesus comes back in His glory. When He comes to take you home, where you belong.

This is the source of our joy. This is the source of our energy. This is what helps us to go through this life rejoicing, to endure praising God. This is what enables us to live as God's children, trusting Him and loving our neighbours as ourselves.

I pray for you today, brothers and sisters, don't be like Jesus' disciples before the resurrection, don't hope small, don't hope for this life only! Be like His disciples after they had seen the risen Jesus. Hope big!

For this hope, that Peter is writing about, is much bigger than we can now imagine. And be assured that this hope is yours! Imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept for you, until your time comes.

And the peace of God which surpasses all our understanding keeps your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ.

Amen.