

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church - WLLS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Easter 2 March 30, 2008 **1 Peter 1:3-9**



Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perished even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

People of God-rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the crucified and risen Lamb of God:

From time to time – I get an e-mail that is exceedingly powerful. I got one the other day. It was about an experiment – an experiment in context, perception and priorities. That’s exactly what it’s about – context – what’s going on around you? Perception – are you paying attention? Priorities – do you realize what’s precious and what’s worthless? Imagine perhaps the greatest living violin player in the world – a man named Joshua Bell. Joshua is paid \$1,000 per minute to play his violin. Imagine him setting up with a Stradivarius violin – worth \$3.5 million. Imagine him playing music written by Bach and Schubert for some 45-minutes. The thing is – Joshua didn’t wear an Armani tuxedo – he wore a long sleeve t-shirt, jeans and a Washington Nationals baseball cap. The place he played was not a concert hall filled with ticket holders in their fancy clothes – sitting in theatre seats. Joshua played in a Washington Subway Station! Did anyone notice? Did anyone realize? Did anyone care? 1,097 people walked past Joshua. You can watch the video – as people – almost every single one of them – walk by – paying almost no attention at all. How could something be important – in a subway station? How could someone be important – wearing jeans and a t-shirt and a baseball cap? How could something be precious if it’s free? The people who walked past Joshua Bell were well dressed people – wearing nice clothes – on their way to all kinds of middle level management positions in the government. They were all caught up in their own little world – pushing piles of papers here and there – doing what it takes to get along with the people you have to get along with – working your way slowly but surely up the ladder. Making more and more money – so you can buy a bigger flat screen High Def TV – drive a nicer car – live in a nicer home – go out to eat on Friday night – then cocoon the rest of the weekend – retiring with enough money to be very comfortable! More worried about their cholesterol and their blood pressure and their heartburn and their trouble sleeping – worrying about their mortgage and their marriage. And then – right before them – was a once in a lifetime – priceless and free gift – and they missed it. They ignored it. They didn’t begin to understand what they had and they lost it! How sad is that? It’s one thing – to miss the world’s most beautiful music. It’s a whole different thing to miss the salvation of your soul. This Sunday after Easter God’s Word says--

We Have The Living Hope of Heaven!

1. Sometimes we have grief in trials

2. Someday we will have joy in Heaven.

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on – is part of Simon Peter's first letter to believers in Jesus. The first to read Simon Peter's letters were people who lived in Asia Minor – present day Turkey. They were the people of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia – Lydia and Pamphylia and Cilicia. Sound familiar? Remember the list of places from which the people came to Jerusalem – to celebrate Pentecost – to celebrate Thanksgiving – when Simon Peter preached about Jesus, Good Friday and Easter? Simon Peter was moved by the Holy Spirit – to write words of law and gospel to these God's people – especially those who struggle! People who love Jesus do not live on easy street! People who love Jesus do not have a Savior who makes all their troubles go away. People who love Jesus have a Savior who makes us strong enough to endure the troubles and problems of life. Jesus makes us strong – not to escape – but strong to persevere! So lift up your heads – your redemption is drawing near!

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! *Praise be to God!* That's what we do here in God's House. We praise Him, thank him, glorify him! Last Sunday – between services a very small person came into the Church office – holding a quarter. She said quite literally – “Here is a thank-offering for Jesus!” – handed me the quarter and turned and walked away. Here again was a small physical heart – filled with God's amazing grace. Here in God's House we praise God. We do that – when we come to church before it begins – and sit here and say our prayers. We praise God when we sing God's praises – when we pay attention to the words of the hymns. We praise God when we listen to the Scripture readings – when we sing the Psalm – when we listen to the sermon – and take to heart the applications – seeing my sins and my mistakes – not the weaknesses and short comings of our brothers and sisters. We praise God when we encourage the people who live in our house – our home – who eat meals with us and watch movies with us – and ride in the same car with us to come to Church. We praise God when we bring our children to Sunday School – and then we stay for Bible Class – to learn God's Word and grow in faith – and discuss applying God's Word in the most practical ways to our day to day life. We praise God – when we look for opportunities to share the Gospel and put our faith into practice!!

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. When Simon Peter first wrote his letters people were beginning to suffer actual literal physical persecution for no other reason than they loved Jesus! There is no end to how creative the human mind can be – inspired by the devil – to cause excruciating pain to people! There was a Greek playwright named Euripides who wrote a play called *Antiope*. In it a character Dirke is murdered by tying her to the horns of a bull. One of the ways to kill Christians was to stage this play – then tie a Christian lady to the horns of a bull – where she would actually die. Talk about *realism* – plays where characters were supposed to die – and they *actually died!* How amusing – thought the Roman poor and homeless – who came to the coliseum to be amused! Christians were covered with animal skins then literally torn to pieces by wild dogs. Christians were crucified – tied to poles – covered with tar and pitch and set on

fire to be the most terrible street lights along Roman highways. If you could be literally thrown to the lions because you confessed Christ crucified and risen – *you would very quickly need to decide just how much of a Christian you were going to be.* There are people still today – who actually face beating and imprisonment and death for loving Jesus. The bigger danger in Watertown comes from lite beers and hard lemonades and brandy old fashioned on Saturday night – then soft pillows and warm blankets on Sunday morning!

These (trials and troubles) have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Jesus makes your faith stronger – through times of trouble and testing. I read again the other day about a young woman named Whitney. Whitney was in a terrible car accident. Whitney was in a van – going down the Indiana toll road when the van was hit headon by an 18-wheeler – where the truck driver fell asleep at the wheel! Five people in the van died. Whitney was horribly hurt. She had multiple broken bones. Her head was so badly hurt – you couldn't recognize her. In fact her family and her friend's family thought Whitney was her friend – that her friend was Whitney – that Whitney had died in the crash. It wasn't until a month later that they realized Whitney was the pretty little blonde girl who had survived! Now what? Whitney will tell anyone who will listen – that her life was spared because Jesus loves her. Whitney will tell anyone who will listen – that there must be a reason – there must be some very important reason why her life was spared. Whitney lives every single day – with a deep and abiding sense of purpose. She is watching all the time – waiting for something very important to happen – where she will make a powerful difference – because Jesus kept her alive to be there! Do you have that feeling? Do you appreciate the fact that you are alive – here – today – because Jesus has a very important reason for you to be here? Do you live your life – with a deep and abiding sense of purpose – that you are not just taking up time and space? That you are here – because Jesus has something very important for you to do? Jesus makes your heart beat – your lungs breathe because you are here to serve him. **Your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – grows stronger and stronger – through troubles and problems!**

Though you have not see him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. It's hard to explain what heaven will be like – when it is so different from the pain and troubles of this world. The Bible tells us Heaven is kind of like one of the most happy and joyous events people celebrate – a wedding feast. We went to a very nice place the other night – where they have you taste – try – sample – all the different foods they serve at a wedding feast. You get to have all the samples you want! When you sit down at the table they have salads – plate after plate after plate of salads all made. Some are a tomato slice on top of a thin slice of goat cheese – with a single leaf of some very flavorful herb – repeat goat cheese and tomato! Some are different fruits – melons and berries. Some are fresh vegetables on all kinds of leaf of lettuce – with creamy dressings and little shreds of cheese. Then come all sorts of meats – slices of chicken with mushrooms and cheeses inside – a slice of duck – darker brown – with different mushrooms and cheeses – mushrooms Wellington – flaky pastry around it – a slice of watermelon – grilled on top of rice with a Wasabi juice on it – beef tenderloin on top of garlic mashed potatoes – slices of prime rib – spears of asparagus all arranged with wine sauces drizzled back and forth. A wedding feast with more different kinds of meat in one place than I have ever seen. This is nothing – absolutely nothing

—compared to the wedding feast we will have in heaven. Because earthly wedding feasts always come to an end. People hug you and say we have to be going now. People hug you. They literally cry and say I love you but we have to go. It's getting very late. And they leave. And sometimes—sometimes—you don't ever see them again—in this world. When we get to heaven without doubt the best part will be to see Jesus. There can be no question or debate—the best part by far—will be to see Jesus. And if that was all there was—it would be wonderful. But we will be in heaven with all the people who love Jesus, too. The Great I AM—is the God of Abraham, his son Isaac, his grandson Jacob. By faith we are all children of Abraham. It will be the most wonderful family reunion ever—because no one will ever leave. We will all be home. We will never ever lose anyone again!

Though you have not see him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. What matters is the final outcome—the eternal rescue of our immortal souls! When you meet new people—when for an hour—your paths cross—do you wonder if they are going to heaven? We were at that dinner—tasting different foods. We were at a table for 10 people—and a very nice couple we didn't know at all—sat across from us. Could you ask them—where are you getting married? Could you ask them if they have a pastor—a shepherd—someone looking out for them? What would you say if they said—we don't have anything against organized religion—we just don't go to any church! What would you say? Would you—could you ask them—are you baptized? Oh, yes—I'm baptized but I don't ever go to Church. I don't know what you are supposed to believe! What would you say??? Believe in Jesus! In a nutshell—in a moment—say—believe in Jesus! What does that mean? At the same time—it is both as exceedingly complicated as all of God's Word—the whole council of God. And at the same time—it is as simple as believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. It's as simple as God loved this world so much he gave his one and only Son—that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life! Believe in Jesus. Love him. Trust him. He has taken away all your sins! And one day—some day—we will see in Jesus in Heavenly joy! Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony E. Schultz