

Your Hope-Filled Future
1 Peter 1:3-5
March 1, 2015

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.

Those of you who follow baseball should be familiar with the name Darryl Strawberry. Darryl was a promising ball player, but he had some serious life problems. In November of 2000, Darryl stood before a judge in Tampa, Florida. He was drug-addicted, he had been in jail, and now he had cancer.

Darryl made a confession before the court that went something like this. “I am an addict. I have spent much of my time and money finding and using drugs. I figured someday the drugs would kill me. I felt that my life wasn’t worth living. The honest truth is, I just wanted to die. I would have just gone ahead and killed myself, but I couldn’t. I have five kids. When I looked at them, I understood it wouldn’t be fair to them for me to kill myself, no matter how I did it.”

Darryl Strawberry was going through one of the “dark nights of the soul.” Those times when life seems like one pothole of pain after another. I’ve been there. I think it’s probably safe to assume most of you have been there at one time or another.

Peter had certainly been there. He lived through a “dark night of the soul” which was deeper than anything I can imagine. Peter denied his best friend. Peter denied the person who was about to die for his salvation. Peter denied, not once, but three times. And the moment he realized what he had done, the pain in Peter’s soul must have been almost unbearable.

I wonder if Peter was thinking about that “dark night” when he penned the words of today’s sermon text. I wonder because these words could only be written by one type of person. The only person who could write this sentence is someone who has felt the true depth of forgiveness and hope.

Today, we will use Peter’s words to fill our spiritual arsenal so we can carry on through life’s “dark nights of the soul.” We will learn why Peter felt such a hope-filled future so we can have the same hope.

Peter opens this letter with: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy* (1 Pet 1:3 NIV). This is our first stop. We need to consider the words “great mercy.” The dictionary defines mercy as compassionate treatment for those who don’t deserve it or who can’t afford it.

Scripture is full of stories about people crying out for God's undeserved mercy: the leper at Jericho: *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!* (Mk 10:47 NIV); the Canaanite woman: *Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!* (Mt 15:22 NIV); the ten lepers: *Jesus, Master, have [mercy] on us!* (Lk 17:13 NIV); the tax collector in the Temple: *God, have mercy on me, a sinner* (Lk 18:13 NIV).

The mercy of God is reason enough for every Christian to celebrate every day of his or her life. Our hope lies in the fact that God's mercy is without end. The psalmist rejoices: *O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever* (Ps 106:1 KJV). Theologian Warren Wiersbe says, "Grace is when God gives me what I don't deserve; mercy is when God doesn't give me what I do deserve."

Let's move farther into our text: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth* (1 Pet 1:3 NIV).

As Lutherans, we don't use the phrase "born again" very much. I guess we wouldn't want anyone to think we were Baptist or Pentecostal or Non-denominational. But it's a shame that we shy away from two words that so accurately describe what has happened to us.

As children of God, we are not some kind of upgraded sinner. We're not new clothes on the same old body. Born again is exactly what happened at our baptism. Through our natural birth, we were born as children of condemnation, enemies of God. In the waters of baptism, we weren't just converted, we were literally born again. We were made new creatures. Jesus said: *I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit* (Jn 3:5 NIV).

Our new birth is like a painter in Paris, who set out to paint a picture entitled "Life." He set up his easel, opened his paints and started to paint his masterpiece. He painted the pigeons in the park, the tulips along with sidewalk, and the bustle of people on the street.

After a while, he noticed that his colors weren't true and his perspective was poor. He backed up, took a good look at his work, and threw the painting in the trash. Then he put another canvas on the easel and started again.

So it is with the new birth God has given us through his mercy. The old you has been completely replaced by the new you. Our hope for the future comes from being born again.

Saint Peter goes on to say: *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* (1 Pet 1:3 NIV).

The hope we have for the future is a living hope. It's alive and it keeps us alive. Like any other living thing, our hope doesn't just exist – it grows. We feed our hope with the promises of God. Our hope grows as we watch God's promises come to reality; as we

see sinners saved; as we see help supplied for those in need; as we feel forgiveness through the body and blood of Holy Communion.

Some people go through life moping around. Some by groping for answers. Others by coping as well as they can. But Christians respond to life by hoping. Not just an empty positive attitude, but an optimism grounded in God's promises. Christians are optimistic about both the here-and-now and the by-and-by.

Listen to what Martin Luther had to say about our enduring hope. *"It is a great comfort to us to hear that great saints, who have the Spirit of God, also struggle. Those who say that saints do not sin would deprive us of this comfort. Samson, David, and many other celebrated men, [who were] full of the Holy Spirit, fell into [serious] sins. Job and Jeremiah cursed the day of their birth; Elijah and Jonah were weary of life and desired death. No one has ever fallen so grievously that he may not rise again. Conversely, no one stands so firmly that he may not fall. If Peter fell, I too may fall. If they rose again, I too may rise again."*

Let's take another step into our text to find the real bedrock of our hope: *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* (1 Pet 1:3 NIV).

The bottom line of our hope comes from an empty tomb. Our burdens, our trails and pains, our heartaches and sorrows are all swallowed up by the resurrection of our Savior. With his resurrection, Jesus guaranteed our wonderful hope for the future.

In one of his lighter moments, Benjamin Franklin wrote his own epitaph. With a bit of humor, Mr. Franklin describes what a Christian's hope-filled future looks like. Here's what he wrote:

The Body of Benjamin Franklin
Like the cover of an old book
Its contents torn out
And striped of its lettering and gilding
Lies here, food for worms.
But the work shall not be wholly lost
For it will, as he believ'd
Appear once more
In a new and more perfect edition
Corrected and amended by the Author.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead separates Christianity from all other religions. The religions of the world offer various rewards based on the performance of the believer. Only Christianity gives the eternal hope of everlasting life based solely on the actions of God.

During one difficult period, when things appeared especially bad, Martin Luther was seen tracing two Latin words on the tabletop with his fingertip: *Vivit! Vivit!* That means, "He lives! He lives!" Because Christ lives, we can live abundantly today and eternally

tomorrow, a life that is both forgiven and forever. So lift up your heads, focus on your Lord, put a smile on your face, and say: *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* (1 Pet 1:3 NIV).