

Life Sunday Sermon 2018

1 Peter 3:15-22 "Hope For Life"

Rev. Michael W. Salemink, Executive Director of Lutherans For Life

www.lutheransforlife.org

Who's asking about hope? Who's gonna ask about our hope? And why would they have to ask us, Mister Peter? Wake up and smell the progress! I mean, welcome to the Roman Empire! You're writing during the good old days, the golden age, classical antiquity, the height of human civilization. We're living in the *Pax Romana*, an awesome civilization beyond the best years Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, or Greece ever saw. We're talking two solid centuries of military tranquility. Look at our political unity and economic stability. Check out our technological innovation and philosophical insight. They compose tomes and poems about these times. They paint masterpieces and put up monuments to our society. They name half the calendar after our era. Our cultural achievements will epitomize the western world for millennia to come, often imitated but never duplicated. Hope? We don't need those stinkin' pledges! We've got tonight; who needs tomorrow? Carpe diem!

What's that? How's it working out? You mean how's that working out for us? Well, we consider women property. And we treat slaves like animals. Popular superstitions involve sacrifice, sometimes even children. We do encourage rampant promiscuity, approve ritual prostitution, engage in rank perversion. Of course, bribes buy government corruption and judicial discrimination. We expect and accept rampant fraud in commerce. Yes, we ignore or oppress the poor and persecute minorities. We do discard the elderly, exile the disabled, abort or abandon babies. Floods and famines devastate. Epidemic infections decimate. Days run long and cut lives short. What were you saying about hope again? Y'all got any more of that left?

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advances have extended life expectancy. Our automated mechanisms have lowered costs and increased leisure. Our agricultural revolutions have procured surplus resources and secured equitable property distribution. We're establishing representative government the world over while exploring and inhabiting outer space. We're enshrining in global law justice and choice for education and employment, self-expression and sexuality. We've domesticated earth's raw materials and tamed nature's ways while preserving the planet's diverse environments and equally valid civilizations. We've swapped conquering for cooperation because we see the not-uniqueness of human beings.

Who needs hope anymore? Who'd ask Christians about hope anyway, Mister Preacher? We have long since shown them to be obsolete, irrelevant, unsuccessful, and pathetic. We find them ignorant, gullible, unrealistic, and plain lazy. They've proven themselves intolerant, arrogant, annoying, and just mean. They've revealed how inconsistent, hypocritical, dishonest, and downright debunked they can get. Christians get themselves ridiculed, evicted, imprisoned, tortured, and murdered clinging to their legends and their delusions and their traditions. Their kind of hope, with its ludicrous doctrines and silly little rituals, leaves them loners, losers, fundamentalists, and fanatics with a fetish for fabrications, from Peter's epistle to the present.

Wait, what? Are we happy? What do you mean am I happy? We've gotten really prosperous and powerful. We've grown rather attractive and quite productive. We're winning history. Now, I suppose our workaholicism hasn't added to our joy and beauty. I guess our obsession with physical youthfulness hasn't led to fulfillment or contentment. I'll grant that liberating sexuality from marriage or childbearing hasn't laid to rest guilt or grief or fear or indifference. I will acknowledge that abortion on demand and embryocidal experimentation

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haven't eliminated discomfort, dysfunction, disease, or natural disasters. I admit that death deals with death can't destroy or control suffering but only transfer it or try to distract from it. Actually, it's compounding the competing and complaining we do. In many ways, it's amplifying our abusive behaviors and chemical dependencies. As a matter of fact, it's aggravating our anger and conflict. Truth be told, it's intensifying isolation and multiplying evil.

So no, I'm not celebrating. I'm settling. We're all settling. We secretly sense how we do not suffice in and of ourselves. We detect deep down that we have earned the affliction and deserve it. We let go of what's right for us to lay hands on instead on what's right before us. We naturally gravitate toward what we can own rather than waiting for what we will enjoy. We instinctively accept ourselves as cheap imitations and poor replacements for the Almighty Maker. Pack and pollute our God-shaped opening until it turns into a self-inflicted injury too hidden for Him to excavate, irrigate, and occupy. Better to hurt on our own terms than to delight on His terms. If we can't get all the credit, then we'll take all the blame.

Nevertheless, hope persists. Hope has a thicker skin. Hope sports a stiffer spine. Christian hope has a better way, a better life, for us too, even for you. Gospel hope's smile can stomach us and save this. We tend to underestimate God and likewise overlook hope's hardiness. In imagining ourselves as gods, we envision Him similar to us. Only God doesn't give up so easily. He remains wonderfully steadfast, magnificently stubborn. With the vigor of Father, Son, and Spirit, He pesters all our failures and our every pain with His hope, badgering tragedies and hounding wreckages, however unexpected and inescapable they appear, until He wrings respect out of evil and renders death itself gentle. Dust settles, but hope stands, because Christ Jesus is Lord.

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Jesus is here. He has come in the flesh, embryo and peasant, body and blood. He has suffered—physically, visibly, right alongside. He invades the world’s poverty, promiscuity, perversion. He incarnates humankind’s frauds, floods, infections. He engages sinful fear and indifference. He undertakes our grief and guilt. He abides our contempt and conflict. He accompanies unborn, infant, adolescent, impaired, elderly. He escorts loners, losers, and lazy ones. He involves God in our dependencies, discomforts, dysfunctions, and disasters with the presence, compassion, and power of Holy Trinity. Christ Jesus is Lord, and hope springs!

No movement goes to waste. He presses every atom into service. He has ascended to subject all powers to His good and gracious will. He who has brought us salvation from His servanthood rules the universe. He who has wrought us heaven from His homelessness orders history. He who has worked for us forgiveness from His crucifixion orchestrates each destiny. He who has reaped for us everlasting life from His execution choreographs our times and troubles. He who has derived for us resurrection from His rejection marionettes our lives and losses. He who has forged for us unconditional acceptance from His ultimate abandonment takes hardship and turns it to hope. Christ Jesus is Lord, and hope grows!

He does what’s best, not just what’s *easiest*. He makes folks *get* better and not just *feel* better. He relieves His children *and* their despair—without requirement—so that their conditions may enjoy the confidence and conviction they’ve found. He redeems His people *and* their dread—without qualification—so that their contexts may express the encouragement and cooperation they trust. He repurposes His fellowship *and* our resentment—without request—in order that our episodes will wield the reason and respect we rest in. He appropriates His brotherhood *and* our regret—without stipulation—in order that our incidents will bear the

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purpose and perseverance we depend upon. He consecrates His household *and* your aching—without restriction—for your experiences to reflect the gentleness and generosity you live by. He sanctifies His Church *and* your breaking—without limitation—for your existences to sparkle the enthusiasm and maturity you’re losing yourselves in. Christ Jesus is Lord, and hope yields!

So they will ask. Hearts will ask, “What hope is there in unintended pregnancy?” And we will answer gladly, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), and “He bore our griefs and sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4). Friends will wonder, “What hope is there in zygotes and embryos?” And we will declare readily, “God chose what is low and despised in the world so that no human being might boast” (1 Corinthians 1:28-29). Relatives will inquire, “How is there hope in congenital abnormalities?” And we will proclaim cheerfully, “We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). Neighbors will implore, “How is there hope in conflicted marriages?” And we will confess joyfully, “We are his workmanship” (Ephesians 2:10), “made in his image” (Genesis 1:27), “chosen and royal and holy” (1 Peter 2:9). Acquaintances will insist, “Why is there hope for incapacitated or unresponsive cases?” And we will testify heartily, “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

And they will ask. Colleagues will demand, “Why is there hope in miscarriage and barrenness?” And we will happily verify, “He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all will also with Him graciously give us all things” (Romans 8:32). Clients will question, “Where is the hope for abortion advocates and euthanasia enthusiasts?” And we will eagerly respond, “If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more shall we be saved by His life!” (Romans 5:10). Critics will object, “Where is the hope in

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modesty and chastity?" And we will humbly assert, "He is transforming our lowly body to be like His glorious body" (Philippians 3:21). Skeptics will speculate, "Can I have hope when the damage is irreversible, the condition incurable?" And we will warmly assure them, "This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Sufferers will plead, "Can I have hope when my diagnosis is terminal?" And we will affectionately promise them, "If one member suffers all suffer together" (1 Corinthians 12:26) for "whether we live or die we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8).

There's humanity even in suffering. There's still opportunity in uncertainty. There's promise even in weakness. And there's still enjoyment in the unexpected. Wherever there's life, there is God's grace and Christ's compassion. God never gives up and neither do His people. There's hope for us. There's hope in this, for life now and the kingdom to come. There's hope even in this, for them and for you. Amen.