

WELCOME 26th April 2020 – 3 Easter '20 A

Matthew 28:1-10 & 1 Peter 1:13-23

Good morning! Welcome back to the On-line well of Living Water as our Easter season celebration continues! It's great we can at least be together in this way...even if we can't be together. I'm glad you're here & pray this becomes a place you feel ok & a part of all that's going on. Please do continue to check our website for our weekly Zoom Bible Study catch-ups. Those are proving to be tremendous fun and a nice way to stay in touch...

As we move into this week... It's a basic reality that anyone in emergency response, law enforcement or defense forces will tell you: in crisis or threat situations almost no one "rises to the occasion," but almost everyone "reverts to their training."

That's why schools practice fire drills & lock-down drills...We don't expect a roomful of 3rd graders to suddenly do the right thing when the alarm bells ring...That's why 1st responders train in as close to real life circumstances as possible so that when genuine crisis comes, they "revert to their training" & lives are protected/saved. Almost no one "rises to the occasion," but almost everyone "reverts to their training."

We all understand: that which is most deeply ingrained...core conviction...most deeply firmly held beliefs are what we live out when the heat's on ...push comes to shove...back's against the wall. So Peter, one of Jesus' closest loyal friends, writes to churches that are in crisis...under threat...persecuted...backs against the wall...And he writes to deepen their conviction...strengthen & fortify their faith...reinforce the truth in which they have been trained so that in difficult circumstances that conviction holds firm...and their faith, their relationship to Christ, nurtures & sustains them & widens their impact in the world.

He writes...

For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end.

Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. 1 Peter 1:23

That rock solid conviction that God, in Jesus Christ risen from the dead, has destined us for life that never ends & hope & joy unassailable is what we'll explore & experience today...as we **Move Together in conviction** that we can share with the world, especially when the world stands against us...

Let's pray...and then we'll get stuck into it.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord God, heavenly Father, in raising your Son Jesus from the grave in glory and in sending us your Spirit, you open the way to eternal life. As we grow in our relationship with and resemblance to Jesus each day, let your life burst forth so that each step we take and each word we speak reflects the certainty we have in you. We ask this in Jesus' mighty Name. Amen.

FAITH CHAT:

1. What are some old habits that might trip up your spiritual life?
2. Think of a Christian (follower of Jesus) you admire. In what ways do they resemble/reflect Christ to you?

3 EASTER '20 A – MOVE TOGETHER: IN CONVICTION

I'm a pretty marginal guitar player...oh...I can stay up with most of the music we use in worship & there are some things I play with great gusto & from which I get deep enjoyment...*BUT* I was poorly trained as a young musician & slack in my practice...so there're a few habits built up over a lifetime that mean I will never throw myself in front of an *Australia's Got Talent* audition...or get up a garage band...

I did however have a couple of excellent sports coaches in my younger years & they were grueling about the finer points of footwork/body position & attention to the movement/flow of a game...I was for a time a more successful athlete than musician. The difference was in my training. Like the vast majority of school teachers I remember, those coaches paid attention to the fundamentals...the basics...like the scales I hated playing as a young guitarist, my teachers & coaches wouldn't let me slide on the essentials...the nitty-gritty details of what I needed to know to do well.

Over/over again...those fundamentals...basics...nitty-gritty details have served to help me accomplish things I never thought I could. I am forever thankful to those folks who kept me focused on the basics...fundamentals...ABCs...because those have *never* failed me.

Now...what's that all about? Well...I get that same feeling from Peter...as I read through his 1st letter here circulated far/wide across what we call Asia Minor/Turkey (about the size of NSW)...I see Peter leading these early followers of Jesus (*US*) back to the basics of their faith...fundamentals...essentials...so that for them (*US*) that which is most deeply ingrained...core conviction...most deeply firmly held beliefs can be lived out when the heat's on...push comes to shove...back's against the wall. Because that's *exactly* what *they* are experiencing.

If you've been around LW for any length of time...you've heard me say that the 1st/21st centuries are very similar. Very culturally diverse/socially segregated...Roman Empire allowed vast people movements all across Europe/Asia/ME/Africa...but made clear distinctions ^{b/t} citizen/non-citizen ^{b/t} Roman/'other' people...familiar? 1st cent was also very technologically innovative in this internet/space flight era may seem hard to believe but true. There was extreme wealth & accessibility to education/trades which combined to make the general population spiritually diverse in their private beliefs & devoted to the centralized public worship of Caesar as god-running the show here on earth.

What that means is that followers of Jesus were a minority expression of faith. Christians didn't share the worldview of their non-Xn friends & neighbours. The church was a mixed bag of rich/poor male/female racially socially diverse folks who lived radical equality & unheard of generosity. Their highest goal was not to succeed but to serve at whatever cost. They cared for their neighbour (Xn or not) at whatever cost & would not bow to Caesar no matter the cost. Unlike their shameless pagan countrymen, those Christ-followers lived sexual exclusivity/self-control...They rejected the bloodlust of the gladiator games & the do-whatever-feels good/you feel-like-doing-mindset. All of that painted a target on their backs...The Empire was only too happy to oblige. Christians were the perfect whipping child for any emperor needing an enemy

So throughout this 1st chap of 1st Peter...we see the big fisherman-friend of Jesus leading these disciples (likely none of whom ever laid an eye on Jesus...they believe because someone shared the gospel with them – told them the good news of Christ's rez which defeats death forgives sin & tears down the gates of hell) – Peter leads these followers-under-fire back to the essential elements of their faith...*living hope*...Let's back up a bit to see the full impact of what Peter says...**BIBLES vs 2** *God the Father knew you & chose you long ago...his Spirit has made you holy &...(you) have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. We are not accidents of time & history...random chance lifeforms...The Father summons us into life so that he can claim us as his beloved children by Christ's life/death/rez. vs 3* *we have been born again into a living hope because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead* Everything we believe/teach/confess as followers of Jesus is built on the rez...If Jesus died & stayed dead then nothing he ever did matters...death still wins, sin still stings & evil ultimately triumphs...*BUT BECAUSE* the tomb was empty on the 3rd day as he promised & remains vacant to this day...we now live with an unbeatable undying certainty that when this life ends we will receive life that never ends - joy that is unsurpassed & live face-to-face in God's presence **vs 4** *God is keeping an inheritance for you imperishable, undefiled, & unfading – God promises something no one can take from you...AND you have access to it now while you wait to receive it in full in the Kingdom vs 5* *God is protecting you by his power through faith* even now so that nothing can separate/keep you from his love for you & that inheritance/destiny/future he has in store for you.

All of that sounds wonderful Peter...but when the soldiers have killed my friends & are threatening my family & Jesus still hasn't returned to make all things right & new...When I'm making yet another trip to the cemetery & everyone I love or know is still there...When I'm in modified quarantine & my job's looking shaky & the kids are swinging from the rafters & I can't pay the rent or the rates...Where's your God now? He loves you so much where is he? He's safe in heaven &

here you are broke/sick/dying? What good's your faith? Sound familiar? We still hear that: suffering pain tragedy God loves you? C'mon...pull my other leg... So they (WE) had to learn to live NOW with the FUTURE IN MIND...

Now...vs 13...*So prepare your minds for action & exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world.* This is a funny sentence...looks like a list of 3 things (prepare/exercise/put) Greek doesn't read like that...Main point of that sentence *Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world.* Remember: our hope is not here. Security is not found in this lifetime. Strength is not from this world. Nothing on earth can offer me full satisfaction...complete peace...uninterrupted joy...Peter calls us to lock our hearts onto one thing...the only thing that this world can neither give nor take away: the gracious gift of salvation that is ours in Jesus crucified/risen/ruling over all things in love.

These people were going through horrible circumstances & were being beat down. They were being tested by fire. But Peter calls us to never lose sight of the fundamental truth...the unshakable reality: Our hope is not in status, money, education, or occupation. Our hope is set completely on the grace love & mercy we have received in Jesus Christ. Our hope is in the eternal inheritance. Our hope is in the spiritual blessings God gives freely because we are his beloved sons & daughters. Our hope is on the reserved sign in heaven that promises our place in God's presence & the pleasure of living with him forever. Ps 147:10-11 lays it out perfectly...& Peter picks up the same promise:

*The Lord takes no pleasure in the strength of a horse or in human might.
No, the Lord's delight is in those who fear him, those who put their hope in his unfailing love.*

What God wants of us more than anything else is to delight in rejoice in trust in give thanks for set our hopes in that which he has already provided for us in Jesus Christ crucified/risen/ruling over all things in love. *Heb 6:18-20 - "...we who have fled to God for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong & trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us."* For those who follow Christ, who trust in him alone, hope is always linked to his resurrection from the dead which assures us as day follows night that our future is secure in God's presence...in the company of all who share the joy of his presence & the pleasure of living with him forever. How does Christ guarantee that gift for us?

1 Thess 4:13-14 & 17c - For since we believe that Jesus died & was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died...Then we will be with the Lord forever." ALL Christian hope is secured in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. ALL of his promises are built on the foundation of death's defeat, sin's forgiveness & hell's overthrow by his resurrection. And because of that certainty grounded in the reality of Christ living victorious over sin death & the devil...we live with anchor solid conviction that we will share in that life w/o end in that joy w/o measure in that love w/o limit in that peace beyond all human comparison & understanding...

Knowing what awaits...Peter reminds us is that...in the meantime...hope in Christ empowers our living in this world now. Hope in Christ gives us strength to live in such a way that we please God. Even the private – no one else knows – it's no one else's business – most intimate moments are offered to God for his pleasure...to glorify him not gratify ourselves See...if my only hope is in what this world offers...then I have to live for me...look out for #1...get all I can...pursue pleasure for me above all things even at your expense...you're just a means to gratifying my ends...

But if living hope in Jesus Christ raised from the dead has taken hold of my heart/life...Peter says now you are given the capacity to live as a *self-controlled obedient child of God*...to avoid my old habits that trip me up (*don't slip back*) & holds me accountable to the reality that *God paid a ransom to save (me/us)...the precious blood of Christ*...In that conviction we experience untold joy as we & those around us grow toward fullness in Christ & the living hope of life with Christ in the presence of the Father guides & shapes every thought/word/deed right here right now...love multiplies...love spreads...love transforms our lives & that conviction (certainty of what already is ours in Jesus & what awaits at the end of our days & the right now power that is ours because of Christ alive in us) becomes what we share with those we know who are not yet part of Christ's family. That rock solid conviction that God, in Jesus Christ risen from the dead, has destined us for life that never ends & hope & joy unassailable becomes a word we can speak to others that lasts forever. We too can offer that certainty that conviction...

*Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. 1 Peter 1:13b
For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end.*

Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. 1 Peter 1:23

Let's pray with that in mind...**Lord Jesus anchor our lives fully in your victory over sin death & the evil one. Conform our lives to your powerful love and your infinite mercy. Take hold of all that we are and set us to work speaking your promise of salvation with full assurance and unshakable conviction so the people around us might share in your eternal joy and the Father's endless delight. In your name we pray... Amen**