

### **Following the Risen Jesus: Ransomed by Grace**

1 Peter 1:13-22, Acts 7:30-36

Good morning! I am thrilled that we are able to continue to gather, even while we are physically apart. This past week the mission study team gave us the results of our congregational survey. It was so good to see many of your faces, even if just on the screen! I sure miss seeing you all. This morning I have a question for you—what if you got a FedEx, hand delivered letter. It informed you that a distant relative had died and had left you a substantial inheritance. Enough money that you will never have to worry about money again. What would happen? Would you start to live any differently? Would the inheritance change the way you live your life? Would it show up in how you work? In your giving? In how you spent your free time?

Two weeks ago we celebrated Easter—the most significant day in Christianity. The day we celebrate how Jesus actually did rise again and launch God’s new creation project, making it possible for us to live with him, now and always. Today we are talking about the “so what” of Easter. We’ve been saying what amazing news Jesus’ resurrection is, but what difference does the truth of Easter make in how we live, right now?

This series is called Following the Risen Jesus and our guide is Peter. Peter was the leader of the early church. He was a witness to the crucifixion and to Jesus’ resurrection. Remember it was Peter who repeatedly denied he even knew Jesus on the night of his arrest. But after the resurrection Peter had a remarkable encounter with Jesus. Jesus made it clear that he wasn’t angry about Peter’s betrayals, he loved Peter! And Jesus gave Peter a job—to care for Jesus’ people! Peter’s life after Easter was very different from his life before. Instead of being an impulsive, big talking, insecure follower, he became a courageous leader—calling people to live out the truth of the resurrection. Peter stepped into a new life and he calls each of us to follow him into that life too. Our reading today was from a letter Peter wrote to early

believers in what is now Turkey. He was writing to people trying to live out their faith in an often hostile and scary world. Kind of like us!

Our reading today starts with the word “therefore.” Whenever you see a word like “therefore” or “so” in the Bible, pay attention! The author is giving us the “so-what” of what he just was saying. You should always ask what the therefore is there for. Here Peter points us back to that amazing rescue that Pastor Chris talked to us about last week. Peter said we are given a new birth into a living hope and an inheritance that we can’t lose—our rescue through trusting in Jesus. // New birth! A new life! That is a fresh start. Our God is the God of second chances. Or third, or fourth chances, or as many chances as it takes for us to walk with him. Your past is not an anchor, weighing you down or holding you back. No, we all have a brand-new deal with Jesus! Right now. This new birth is not something you earn or work for. You can’t earn it. It is a gift. We get a fresh start with undying hope because of Easter, because of Jesus’ resurrection. We have confidence in what God is doing for us because of what he did for Jesus. Our hope is because of Easter!

Listen to how the Message translates Peter’s description of this amazing Easter gift we have: “What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have him, this Father of our Master Jesus! Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we’ve been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future starts now! God is keeping careful watch over us and the future. The Day is coming when you’ll have it all—life healed and whole.” A brand-new life with everything to live for. Our future starts now and wholeness and health is coming for us! We are promised a marvelous future, but so much more than that. We are promised a new life today. We can join in this new life of living hope right now. This new birth of Easter is a much bigger gift to us than any surprise gift of money could ever be. How is Easter showing up in your life?

That is what the therefore is there for--- We’ve been given this amazing gift of a new life both now and later—so does it show? Are we living it now? Peter says we start by having minds that are fully alert and sober—prepare your minds for action! We get our minds ready and our actions will follow. Right behavior follows right thinking. In Greek Peter uses a curious phrase for this—gird up the loins of your mind. That sounds like the Bible doesn’t it? I don’t

think I've ever heard "gird up your loins" except in old Bibles. I was never really sure what it meant. It turns out it means tuck your robes up into your belt—get ready to run or to fight. Peter is saying get your mind ready for action. At the time of the first Passover, the people were told to eat the Passover meal standing up, with their staff in their hands, ready to go—with their loins girded. That is our call—get our minds up off the couch and ready to go on our new adventure with Jesus!

There are three key words Peter uses to describe this new life—Hope, Redeem and Holy. Hope, Redeem and Holy. And each of them shows how we can live because of our Easter gift from God. Our so-what of Easter looks like Hope, Redemption and Holy living.

First, hope. Peter says set all your *hope* on the *grace* of Jesus. He starts and ends this passage with hope—our hope in God through Jesus. When we trust Jesus, we can live in the hope that does not disappoint. Where is your hope? Today, as we shelter in place—where is your hope? As we try to follow Jesus, whose efforts are you hoping in? Peter reminds us—our hope is NOT in what *We* do. It isn't in *our* actions, but in Jesus' actions. In the Bible hope does not mean wishful thinking. Hope is not just being upbeat or optimistic. Easter Hope is grounded in reality. It is a confident expectation based on God's work. A confident expectation based on what God has already done. Think of flying on an airplane. We have hope that we'll get there safely, not because we're being cheerful, but because know the safety records of airliners. We have a confident expectation based on what has been done already. It is the same with our new post-Easter life. We live in hope—hope based on the fact of Easter—Jesus' resurrection-- and on the work of Jesus. We set our hope on Jesus' grace to us. Grace is a free gift. It is unmerited. It is what Jesus does for us—not what we do for him. You can live with confidence because the Risen Jesus sees you and he knows you and he loves you. He is crazy about you! Your hope is well founded.

Our second word is Redeemed. Jesus redeemed us from our old, empty way of life. Another way of saying redeemed is ransomed. Jesus *ransomed* us out of our old way of life. He paid to save us from our old lives. Lives focused on greed, on self, on pride, on trying to get ahead by pushing others down. Jesus bought us out of our slavery and gives us a new purpose.

All through this section Peter is drawing connections to the Passover—to God’s great rescue of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Jesus chose to suffer and die and rise again at Passover time because Easter is God’s Amazing Passover Rescue for the whole world. Jesus ransoms us from our own slavery to selfishness—freeing us to live new lives with Him, for the sake of others. New Lives that are turned out in love, not turned in towards fear and anger and hate. These new lives are a gift to us—bought and paid for at the cost of Jesus’ life.

Our third word is the most important and the most easily misunderstood word. It is holy. These days we almost always hear something negative associated with Holy. We say “Holier than thou” to describe people who are unduly proud of themselves and judgmental of the rest of us. Holiness sounds like a bunch of picky rules and scratchy Sunday clothes. Those pictures miss the point here completely. Holiness is what God is. It isn’t a characteristic he possesses; it is what he IS. “Holiness is God’s Godness,” Frederick Buechner says. Holiness is God’s Godness.

Peter’s main command to us is Be holy. Be holy in all you do. We are made in God’s image, but we are broken because we keep trying to do things our own way. God wants us to become more and more like him as we follow him. For people holiness is always about closeness to God—about relationship with God. Buechner says that when we call something Holy it is because it has “something of God’s mark on it.” That is what Peter wants for us—to have God’s mark on us. To reflect God’s action in us out through our lives.

Holiness isn’t something that we earn or get by trying really hard. It is something that happens as we are closer to God. People near to God are holy, in the same way that when you are near a light you are lit up. Now we are told that we have God’s *Holy* Spirit living in us. God’s mark is on you. Do you think we should blend in with everybody else, or should we stand out somehow? God wants our lives to shine—to show other people a different way to live.

Holy living is living that reflects God’s mark on us; it shows his action in our lives. We’ve received the Easter gift of rescue—a new birth with a living hope, starting now. As we live that new life, we start becoming holy. Our ransom, our new life, our hope—are all a gift to us. We can’t earn it and Jesus paid for it. It is a gift that we can refuse though. We have to open

ourselves up enough to let God shine through us. Will we follow the Risen Jesus into this new life, or do we let the culture around us tie us down?

Here is how the Message puts Peter's word for us—"Don't lazily slip back into those old grooves of evil, doing just what you feel like doing. You didn't know any better then; you do now. As obedient children, let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness." A life energetic and blazing with holiness. THAT is our so-what of Easter. We have been ransomed into a new life by Jesus' free gift of grace.

Pastor Dennis Edwards tells about planting a church in Brooklyn. He recalls one guy in the neighborhood named Sam. Sam was a large man with an awkward gait and an intense, scarred face. He looked older than his 55 years. He had been a drug addict for a number of years. Sam had been so deeply into drugs that he had even used in front of his stepdaughter. Sadly, that impressionable little girl had grown up to become a drug addict herself and now all five of her children were also saddled with tremendous, life-controlling problems. This one example of the old, empty way of life that Peter spoke of. Generations of pain, from Sam to his stepdaughter to her kids. By the time Dennis met Sam, he was desperately trying to break that cycle. Sam had started following Jesus after a Billy Graham crusade and was trying to live out his new faith. As he tried to help his stepdaughter and her kids, he recruited people from his little church to help. Sam didn't just want to help his family, he wanted to touch as many lives as he could in a positive way. He said he felt he owed the Lord every minute because of all the time he had wasted earlier in his life. Despite his scary appearance, Sam was now as gentle a person as you could imagine, and he was all in for Jesus.

As the people in the church got to know Sam, his family, his dedication to Jesus, and his service to others, Sam became an inspiration. Jesus had given Sam a new nature. Instead of pursuing a life of self-centered evil, harmful behavior, he was pursuing the good. Sam had a living hope because he had met the Risen Jesus, and it showed in his life. As he drew closer to God, Sam wanted God's best for the people around him. First Pres, as we become more holy, God changes our hearts and our minds—our actions start to come from a heart in sync with God. God gives us a new nature. Not one driven by pride and selfishness and fear but a nature fueled by love, goodness and obedience to God.

Peter sums it all up in verse 22, saying “Love one another deeply, from the heart.” The outcome of holiness is always love for others. Real holiness always results in love for others. Not in meanness, not being judgmental, not petty disapproval; but overflowing, unstoppable love! Fredrick Buechner describes holy people as those who God uses to send his love into world. God sends his love for the world through YOU as you follow Jesus! That is what shows you are holy—being part of God’s mission. We are holy when we reach out with genuine care for our neighbors. As you drop off some flour or toiletries that someone needs. As you make meals for people with nothing to eat. Friends, that is Holy living. We will come through this time of pandemic stronger and closer to Jesus if we live out this call. Let us be the ones who care, who share, who reach out, who check in. We are at home but we are not helpless. We have been given a fresh start into a new life with an undying hope and a sure future. We are empowered by God’s Holy Spirit. We can live with confidence! God’s word gave birth to new life in you, thanks to Easter; and now each of us can live out our new lives, shining God’s love to the people around us.

Let’s pray: Lord Jesus, thank you for saving us. Holy Spirit, move in us and shape us, mold us to live lives blazing and energetic with your Presence and Love. You have given us new birth into your Body the Church, help us show in our lives what we profess by faith. Empower each of us and all of us together to live out your love in our homes, in our neighborhoods, and all along the Wasatch Front!. Amen.