

TEXT: 1 Peter 1:3-5

THEME: The Living Hope

1. A Permanent Inheritance
2. Available to All Who Trust in Christ

³ 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, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵ 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. (1 Peter 1:3-5) NIV84

Dear Phyllis, Mary Jo, Marcie, family and friends of our dear departed brother, Tom:

Hope is one of the necessary ingredients for human life. The Bible is a book of hope. It comes from the God of hope. But nothing seems to rob us of hope as death does.

Because Tom served in the Navy during WWII, reporting for duty just a few days after graduating from high school, and because he served in the Pacific Theater, I am reminded of a strange custom on the Fiji Islands known as “calling to the dead.” The person who has suffered the loss of a loved one climbs up a high tree or climbs to the top of a high cliff, repeatedly calls out the name of the deceased, and then cries out pathetically, “Come back! Come back!” But of course, there is no answer, no response, no hope.

Nothing seems to rob us of hope as death does. We grieve the loss of a loved one. Today you grieve the loss of your husband, your father, grandfather, uncle, friend. Nothing is more natural than that. Even Jesus wept at the grave of his good friend, Lazarus. However, if our hope lies in the God of hope, our sorrow will not steal our hope from us. Hope for us Christians comes from Jesus Christ who died for our sins and won the victory over sin and death when the Father raised him from the grave. **Jesus said..., “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26).**

God pulls no punches. He says there is no hope for men and women who live their lives for themselves and neglect his worship and service. They are without God and without hope in this world, and they have no hope in the world to come. But one who loves and serves the Father by believing in and obeying the Son Jesus Christ has an eternal hope. Tom believed in Jesus as his Savior. He was given that saving faith just three weeks after his birth at his baptism. Fourteen years later, Tom confirmed that saving faith at his confirmation. Throughout his life, Tom gave evidence of his saving faith in the way he lived his life, the way he treated his family, his friends, his employees, and strangers. He gave evidence of his saving faith in his faithful attendance at worship and Holy Communion. He gave evidence of his saving faith in the way he served God and his church. In fact, Tom served on the committee that oversaw the construction of his very church building in 1962. Tom believed in Jesus as his Savior and so he had an eternal hope. Because of that hope, Tom wasn't fearful and didn't fight it when it became obvious to him that his Lord was calling him home. That hope is now a reality for Tom for all eternity; his soul is with Jesus in heaven today and always.

Just as God raised his Son from the dead so he has the power to give eternal life to everyone who believes in him as their one and only Savior from sin. That's why Peter said in our text: **“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.”**

This hope is a LIVING HOPE because Jesus Christ is a living Savior. He promises us, **“Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19).**

This hope is also a PERMANENT INHERITANCE because it is written in heaven. Heaven is where the Christian family of all time is gathering. Tom made it to the family reunion a little before we have. Last Sunday, he received the title deed to his heavenly home. How can we be anything but happy for Tom!—even as we mourn our own temporary loss?

The death of a loved one usually causes us to consider our own mortality. That's a good thing. You might be asking yourself today, “Will I make it to the family reunion someday? Will I spend eternity with our Savior-God and Tom?” If you answer, “Yes” because you think that you are a basically good person or because you think that your good works will make up for whatever sins you've committed, then you are dead wrong—eternally dead wrong. If you trust in yourself for salvation, you have no hope. Tom, on the other hand, had the true hope.

This hope is also AVAILABLE TO ALL WHO TRUST IN CHRIST as their one and only Savior from sin. Heaven is where Christ is. Jesus promised, **“In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going” (John 14:2-4).** I once shared this passage with Tom in a private devotion. I jokingly mentioned that Jesus had probably learned the carpenter trade from his step-father, Joseph, and since Jesus had been preparing our place for almost 2,000 years now, it ought to be quite spectacular. Tom got quite the chuckle out of that, but then said, “You know, Pastor, when you think about that way, it really makes you want to see it.” And now, Tom does see it and he enjoys it for all eternity. When we belong to Jesus, we are never separated from our Savior or our believing loved ones—at least, not for very long.

If we trust in Jesus as our one and only Savior from sin, then instead of saying good-bye to Tom today, we can say, “See you soon, Tom, in all the glory of our Savior-God, in that perfectly engineered, built, and prepared place. See you soon, because our Savior is Lord of life and death, and his resurrection power is our sure hope. Amen.

—Pastor Richard D. Stark