

Gracious God, open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom, and open our hearts and minds that we might know the cries of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and hurting, and sometimes even dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Welcome to the Second Sunday of Easter! The Easter season is that Great Fifty Days between Resurrection Sunday and Pentecost Sunday. The joy of Easter cannot be contained in just one worship service on one Sunday. It needs to be spread out and that is what this season does. This morning, we begin a three part series that we're calling "Revive Us Again." In this time of social distancing and social isolation brought upon us by the necessity of combating a virus for which there is at present no known cure, no proven treatment, and no vaccine, we need a spirit of revival and renewal. We need that spirit so that when the time comes that we can safely be together again, and believe me that day will come, we can share in the joy that Christ brings to us... that, "Indescribable and glorious joy" that Peter mentions this morning.

During these three weeks, we will be following the lectionary texts that come to us from the Epistle of 1 Peter. It's an epistle that wrestles with salvation and all of the trials that we face as followers of Christ but it only makes sense in the light of the Resurrection. So I hope that as we explore these scriptures together that we can experience the joy that comes through our faith, even when that joy may be difficult for us to see in the light of all that we have faced over the past few weeks... especially since Easter Sunday night and the tornadoes that have further upended our lives.

If there is anything that we can agree on, it is that we could use a big helping of revival right now. I'm not talking about some harkening back to the "good old days" that exist only in our memories. I'm talking about the renewal

that comes when we realize and acknowledge anew what God has granted us through our faith. It's the renewal that comes when we strip away all of the garbage and reclaim the joy, the "indescribable and glorious joy" that comes as a result of our faith.

When Peter wrote this letter, the church was in turmoil. The followers of Christ were leading respectable lives, caring for the sick, the prisoner, the widow, and the orphan. They were doing the things that no one else would do, taking care of the people that no one else would care for. But they were being targeted because they were different. They lived by a different ethical and moral framework than the society in which they were located. They were viewed with suspicion and hostility by the people around them. They were being targeted and persecuted because the authorities were obsessed with making the nation safe from outsiders. They were the odd ones.

In that era of persecution and uncertainty, the communities of faith were asking do we need to hide? Do we need to go underground? Do we need to blend in and act like the others? Would it be safer for us to pretend that we aren't saved by grace through faith? Should we act as though we aren't asked to pray for our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, because it's risky and darned hard? The question was, "Should our faith move inside: inside our heads, inside our hearts? Should it be a personal faith that keeps us safe and warm where it really matters in the imaginations of our inner life?"

If the question "should we hide?" Is being addressed in this letter, then who better than Peter to answer it? Peter pronounced his loyalty to Jesus when things were good, but he ran like a scared rabbit when the heat was on. He claimed his steadfastness with loud protests, and then claimed to not know whom they were talking about when someone asked him about Jesus. Peter had been there. He understood the temptation to save your own skin. He was

realistic. He knows what will work and what won't. What do you say Peter? Stay safe? By no means!

We need to study the whole letter to get the full answer, but we can catch a glimpse of Peter's spirit, even in these opening verses. We have a "new birth into a living hope through the resurrection." We have an "inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading." We are "being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Peter urges us to rejoice in this even if we have had to suffer "through various trials."

Peter encourages us that the "genuineness of [our] faith - being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire - may result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Right now, in a time when our world is being turned upside down, our faith is what can keep us going and can keep us strong. In our weakness, we have a strength in the grace and love of God through Christ, a grace that invites us to "rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

Rejoice for the Lord is near.

Rejoice because we have what we need.

Rejoice because God is faithful, even when we are not.

Rejoice, because "the best of all, God is with us."

"We walk by faith, and not by sight" is what the song reminds us. In this time of uncertainty, in this time of testing, may we join with the choir singing "help then, O Lord, our unbelief, and may our faith abound; to call on you when you are near, and seek where you are found."

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.