

"An Amazing Story"
I Peter 1:3-9

Today I take the liberty of telling you something about Simon Peter and how he came to share this tremendous insightful scripture just read. I think he might say something like this:

Following Jesus stated the day my mother-in-law was sick. She was so lethargic and lay there on her palette, trying to sleep it off. But the high fever was so persistent we were worried when she didn't get better. She seemed to be failing. We were afraid we might lose her. Our family went to the synagogue that Sabbath just like we always went to worship. There was a teacher named Jesus who amazed us because he had an air of authority about him as he spoke to us. Everyone reacted to what he was saying. Even a demon spoke up and said, "We know who you are! You are the Holy One of God."

Not long after this, Jesus was teaching by the lakeside. It was mob scene. People just kept coming up and crowding around him. I was through fishing for the day so I let him sit in my boat to teach. I knew what it was like to need elbow room and not be crowded in upon. Jesus knew how to hold an audience in the palm of his hand as he spoke. I was preoccupied with wanting to get home so I could clean up and rest after a lot of hard work casting those nets and catching nothing at all. We were putting our nets away when he told us to put our boats out into the deep water and let our nets down for a catch. I almost didn't do it. I was so tired and just wanted to get home. But there was something in his voice, the way he spoke with such gentle assurance. So we rowed out and cast out our nets. The most amazing thing happened. The net was so full of fish I was afraid the nets would break or the boat was going to sink right then and there. I was sure the story of this amazing event would be talked about everywhere for sometime to come.

Then Jesus invited my brother and me to follow him. He said that instead of catching fish he would teach me how to help him catch men and women for God's kingdom. What an honor! I was the first person called to be one of Jesus' followers. It was something else to see Jesus teach and heal people. Wherever we went, crowds of people flocked around him. How could anyone object to what he was doing? He healed people like he healed my mother in law. He made lives better. People left his presence with their lives changed for the better and a different attitude.

One day, after a particularly trying time, Jesus took us on a retreat. A large part of any retreat with Jesus was prayer. He was always praying. We would wake in the morning to find Jesus praying. After everyone had gone to bed, Jesus would be praying. While we were on the retreat

he asked, "Who are people saying I am?" He knew what they were saying and he knew we knew, but he wanted to hear us say it, I guess. Then he asked, "Who do you say I am?" No one else answered so I said, "You are the Christ of God." Looking back I will admit we did not yet know what that meant because we had triumphal notions and delusions of grandeur. We wanted so badly to hear him say, "Now this is our game plan men, we're going to stir up the crowds and by this time next year I will be the king of Judea and you will be my staff."

Instead, Jesus said, "The son of man will be killed." What a shocker. Jesus was telling us he was going to die and after he was killed he would be raised back to life. It was too much for us to understand. How could one believe that. We all know once you die that's it. Right? Come back to life from being dead?

We all had visions of great things happening to us. We thought greatness would come in political power and influence. We had visions of one kind of kingdom, but not the kind Jesus kept talking about. We had a week to think and talk about it among ourselves. Then Jesus took us with him up a mountain to pray. We hardly got settled in when Jesus began praying. He was pouring out his heart in prayer. He had a unique connection with his Father, and he knew how to pray. While he was praying and we were dozing we saw something defying description. All of a sudden his face started glowing. His clothes were like lighting. We saw his appearance totally change. It was as if there was a magnificent light shining out from him. We watched in terror as suddenly Moses and Elijah were there talking with him. I was too overwhelmed to remember anything about what they said, except they were talking about his departure, his exodus. I thought they were talking about the exodus we commemorate every year as a reminder of God's deliverance of our people from slavery in Egypt. Our celebration always served to remind us God is the deliverer. Moses and Elijah seemed to be encouraging him about his exodus. It was all very confusing and mind boggling.

It was so moving and wonderful I just had to say something. We always erected booths at the feast of booths, so I blurted out, "Hey, let's build some booths here and savor the moment." Looking back, I was such a fool. I didn't get it. Instead of listening and absorbing the moment, I thought I had to say something. Just like at his baptism, God spoke out of the clouds and said, "I love you Son and I'm proud of you. You are on the right track. Now go on and finish what you've started." The rest of what was said was a reminder to me that God had given me a mouth and two ears for a reason. At least that is how I interpreted God telling me to listen to Jesus.

As I reflect on the experience, I saw Moses and Elijah deferring to Jesus. That is why later in my second letter to the early Christians I wrote, "For he received honor and glory from God the

Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory saying, "This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased."

Now shift with me to our scripture reading from I Peter is addressing new Christians who were losing hope. Some were giving up their faith because of the ongoing hostility and persecution they faced. They were struggling with what they should do and what they could do. So Peter addresses the options they felt they had: One was to abandon all hope in Jesus Christ and go with the current flow of life. One was to pretend it really wasn't all that bad and see it through. They could also see it through as they held to their convictions.

The reality is that abandoning or living without hope leads to bitterness or insanity. When one looks at the world and all that goes on it is easy to give into despair and crack under the strain as one feels helpless and powerless in the face of current reality. We know a bit about that in this current pandemic we are living through.

Many people choose to pretend everything is ok and live in denial of the reality of the situation. Pretending is a way of survival. The popular motto of pretenders is, Nothing is so bad it can't get worse, but then they get stuck on the question, What did I do to deserve this happening to me? Because there is no satisfactory answer people will try to find a way to cope. Some run away succumbing to drugs, booze, work, whatever will ease the pain and help them cope.

Peter told the despairing Christians some 2000 years ago that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the true hope one can count on. This from the great escape artist of his time. He ran away in denial 3 times. But after the resurrection of Jesus he became one of the greatest leaders and spokespersons in the new Christian movement. This scripture passage is his credo. His letters became his response out of his own personal experience. The resurrection changed him from the escape artist into a realist who faced life and reality head on to the point of later dying a martyr's death on the cross. He requested to be crucified upside down as he was not worthy of being crucified as Jesus was crucified. Peter claims the resurrection not only changes one here and now but tells us something better is coming for us, the outcome of one's faith, the salvation of one's soul.

A woman was diagnosed with cancer and given three months to live. Her doctor told her to make preparations to die. She contacted her pastor and had him come to the house to discuss her final wishes. She told him the songs she wanted sung at the service and the scriptures to be read. She wanted to be buried with her favorite Bible. As the pastor got up to leave she said to him, "There is one more thing." "What is that," he asked? "This is very important to me," she said. "I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand." All the surprised pastor could say was,

"What? I don't understand." The woman explained, "In all my years of attending church functions where food was involved, my favorite part was when they were clearing away the dishes after the main course and the server would lean over and say, 'You can keep your fork.' It was my favorite part because I knew then something better was coming. It wasn't Jell-O or pudding. It was cake or pie. When people see me in my casket with a fork in my hand I want them to wonder, 'What's with the fork?' Then in the service I want you to tell them, 'Something better is coming, keep your fork too.'" Prior to the funeral, the pastor heard many people, including family members, inquire about the fork. He smiled to himself. During the service he told them about her request and what the fork symbolized for her. He told them he could not stop thinking about the fork. He told them they would probably not be able to stop thinking about it either. He was right. The next time you reach for your fork, may it gently remind you there is something better coming, not just a dessert at the table, but eternal life.

Christ is risen and invites us to rise to new life here and now. Easter invites us to make the choice to try again to break what ever addiction and/or besetting sin you struggle with as you wonder if you can ever overcome it. Easter is a choice to work again at our relationships in life. Easter is an opportunity to reach out to a neighbor. Easter is the invitation to grow in love. Easter is the promise of new vision of life. Easter is the opportunity to renew our faith so we might "mount up with wings like eagles, run and not faint." Easter is the answer to whatever is causing us to lose hope.

Never take this Easter faith for granted. Always be grateful to God for the gift of your salvation because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.