

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Second Sunday of Easter
April 12, 2026
9:30 AM

Text: Acts 2:14a, 22-32 & 1 Peter 1:3-9

Theme: Hope: Already; Not Yet

[prayer]

When I was a young girl, my grandmother showed me a set of delicately embroidered handkerchiefs made by my great-grandmother. “These are for your hope chest,” she remarked. That is when I first learned what a hope chest is. It used to be that a young woman would collect linens, clothing, and household goods and lay them aside in a wooden chest in anticipation of the day she would be married and start a home. While I do not have an actual hope chest, my grandmother did set aside certain items over the years with the intention that one day, when the time was right, I would inherit those items. It was her way of praying and preparing for a season she had faith would one day come.

In his letter to the early church, the Apostle Peter describes something like a heavenly hope chest, where our divine inheritance is stored, “a pure and enduring inheritance that cannot perish – an inheritance that is presently kept safe in heaven” (1 Pet 1:4 CEB). This inheritance is different from earthly inheritances because it is imperishable. There is no force or power that can destroy it; it will endure for all eternity.

What is this inheritance? It is our salvation.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (v. 3 NRSVUE). What set the early Christians apart from their Jewish siblings was their belief that Jesus fulfilled all of God’s promises in the Old Testament – promises to save His people from sin and death and to establish His divine reign over all creation forever. Today, when we call Jesus the Christ (the Greek word for messiah), we are, with a single word, making the same statement

of belief. By raising Jesus from the dead, God confirmed Jesus is the Messiah, the One who God promised would save the world. Jesus is the One through whom our salvation is accomplished. He is also the One in whom resides the promise of the new age that is to come. This is the central claim of the Gospel. And behind that claim is some very good news: God is faithful. God keeps His promises.

It can be hard to believe that good news, though, when our personal circumstances or the circumstances of the world around us seem anything other than good. I felt deep peace and joy as we celebrated Jesus's resurrection last Sunday; I hope you did, too. And then the week that followed was filled with big, hard things: beloveds diagnosed with cancer, mental health challenges, threats of civilizational annihilation. The emotional high of Easter Sunday did not last long.

I will reiterate what I said in last week's sermon: Our lives frequently do not reflect the perfect joy of Easter morning. We are not being bad Christians when we admit that. Believe it or not, when we are honest about that reality, we are actually being faithful Christians. Our faith teaches that joy and suffering are comingled with each other. Jesus went through great suffering before he experienced the joy of resurrection, and he suffers in solidarity with us even as he enjoys the glory of heaven.

Even though some of the earliest Christians saw the Risen Christ with their own eyes, they continued to face trials and tribulations, so much so that Peter was compelled to write them the very letter we read from today. This letter was a message of encouragement to those first Christians that while they labored and struggled and suffered, they did not do so without hope. God was keeping safe for them in heaven their salvation – the redemption of both their bodies and their souls. Recall that the New Testament understanding of salvation is deliverance of the whole person. Our souls are safe in God's keeping, and though our bodies will temporarily perish, one day they will be restored to us. We are "guarded by God's power" (v. 5) so that we can receive the fullness of salvation that God will reveal at the end of time when we enjoy eternal life with Him in the New Creation.

In the meantime, we live in the tension of a hope that is already-but-also-not-quite-yet. We exist in a liminal space in salvation history, between the moment of Jesus's resurrection and the moment of his return in final victory. Our present difficulties are bracketed by these two events. Christ's resurrection is the

assurance that our difficulties are not the end of our stories, and Christ's return is the promise that these difficulties will not only be overcome but also redeemed. Both events center on the action of God in Jesus Christ. This is why Peter says our hope is "living" (v. 4): It is living (alive) because our hope is not a vague wish or abstract concept. Our hope is a person – Jesus the Christ – and we declare, through faith, that Jesus is alive.

Peter reminds us to "rejoice in this hope" even as we are "distressed for a short time by various trials" (v. 6). He tells us that our trials and tribulations are necessary for producing a genuine faith. Faith is the decision to trust God is protecting and preserving us to the very last day. Genuine faith rejoices and gives thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:16-18). Joy is not the reward for a life of faith; instead, it is our response to the knowledge that we have treasure in heaven that moths and mice cannot destroy and thieves cannot steal (Matt 6:20). Joy weaves itself into every facet of the Christian life, even the moments of deep suffering. Like the person of Jesus, joy brackets salvation history. We begin in joy and we will end in joy.

One commentator asks, "What does the resurrection mean for us as a people? It means there is a 'not yet' to the fullness of salvation, but a 'now' to the anticipation and joy of that fullness."¹

During this Easter season, we are reflecting on the spiritual virtue of hope. Hope is the confident expectation that God has already ordered the end of all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom 8:28). And if hope is a living thing as Peter tells us, then it must be nourished. Which spiritual practices and disciplines help us cultivate hope, so that we can live the life of confident expectation God intends for us?

The first spiritual discipline that helps us cultivate hope is the discipline of worship. Every Sunday when we gather for worship, we celebrate with joy the presence of the Risen Christ among us, specifically here, at the Lord's Table. Here the real presence of Jesus meets us in the bread and the cup. As we approach the Table, we remember Jesus's death and resurrection and the salvation they have accomplished for us. As we receive his body and blood, we are strengthened by

¹ Thomas R. Steagald in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 393.

God's grace for the journey of faith. And as we depart this place we carry with us a foretaste of eternity where the hope that is kept for us in heaven will be consummated in the New Creation.

According to the Pew Research Center, the average American Christian attends worship just once per month.² That is just twelve times per year, with perhaps an extra day for Christmas Eve.

I believe the Risen Christ meets us whenever and wherever we show up with a heart tuned to sing God's praise, even if we are only Christmas and Easter Christians. But faith grows when we tend it. Hope grows when we feed it. Worship is a set-apart time when we can step out of the grind of daily life, step away from our troubles, and step into God's *kairos* time where eternity breaks through into the present. Worship is where we can enter the sanctuary of God and give voice to our eternal joy through our prayers, our songs, and our fellowship. The more we make time for the spiritual discipline of worship, the more confident we become in our salvation and the more our hope grows in spite of our earthly circumstances.

My first encouragement to you this Easter season is to grow your hope by growing in your discipline of worship. If your worship attendance is once per month, set yourself the goal of attending twice per month. If you attend twice per month, strive for every Sunday. And if you attend most Sundays, look for ways to expand your participation. Volunteer to serve as a liturgist or serve communion. Join the music ministry. Offer a testimony. Engage in worship outside of the worshipping community through daily prayer and devotion. Take your worship into the community through acts of service and witness. Invite a friend to church with you.

Whenever, wherever, and however you choose to worship, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope (Rom 15:13).

Amen.

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/religious-attendance-and-congregational-involvement/>