

Easter 2 Year A
Resurrection rebirth

Readings: Acts 2: 14a, 22 – 32
Psalm 16
1 Peter 1: 3 – 9
John 20: 19 – 31

Our readings for today bring the idea of hope and faith to the fore. Hope, in general terms, is the trust, the longing, the belief or confidence in something. In a way, it's the envisioning of something yet to come. It's internally seeing what we don't see with our eyes. It's visualising some thing or situation that is more positive than what we're currently

experiencing. Usually the issue of hope is raised when we are not content with our situation; where we are looking for something better. I think it would be fair to say that hope is born from our sense of suffering or struggle.

People struggle and suffer in all kinds of ways. The question of hope is one that we face at some point in our lives. How many of us have ever hoped or envisioned or looked forward to better things in a time of struggle? Is there any hope, then, for struggling and suffering people? Is there hope for the married couple who seem to wind up at the same dead-end of unresolved conflict again and

again? What about the person who has fallen victim to alcohol, drugs or gambling or any of a number of addictive behaviours; the person who is in so deep that he or she fears they'll never find a way out? Is there any hope for them? Where is the hope for the mother-to-be who goes to her mid-wife or doctor for a routine check-up and hears the words, "I'm sorry; we can't find a heartbeat?" Or for a single parent, who works a full-time job by day, serves as both mother and father by night and wonders to him/herself-- "How long can I keep this up?" What about the person who battles depression and anxiety? What about the person who stands by a loved one's bedside as they lie dying? And where is the hope

for a generation of young people who seem to be an easy mark for drugs, abuse, or the pain of a broken family? Where is hope? What is its source?

Our readings today provide an opportunity to explore hope for people in light of testing circumstances. They identify how God and God's activity are central to their hope and to the meaning and purpose of their life. From psalm 16 the writer trusts the Lord's hand even in the face of immanent death and yet confident in God's guiding direction toward a better way of life: "Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. For you do not give me up to

Shē'ōl...You show me the path of life” (Ps. 16: 9-11a). Building on this psalm, Peter’s speech in Acts 2, after encountering the risen Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, declares his confidence in the power of God over death as demonstrated in Christ’s resurrection: “But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power...This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses” (Acts 2: 24, 32). Although no longer having Jesus with them to see with their eyes, Peter and the rest of Jesus’ followers had a hope, an envisioning of their life that helped them overcome fear and

boldly proclaim their message of hope in Christ.

Both readings remind us that death and life are broader than the issues of physical death and immortality. They also remind us of how hope, particularly hope in God, can shape the way we face or respond to our reality. Hope has the potential to change us or to bring us from the point of despairing sadness into joyful confidence.

Death and resurrection both come under the authority of God; the God and Logos, according to the Gospel of John, through whom all things were created; the same one in

whom God's ancient promises of the Messiah are fulfilled; the risen Christ in whom Thomas declared "My Lord and my God."

Like the other disciples and followers of the crucified Jesus Thomas was disillusioned and afraid behind locked doors. Until his encounter with the risen Christ, Thomas remained cynical and perhaps resentful after his loyalty and service put into following Jesus. It seemed to have all counted for nothing when Jesus died. Thomas's reality of trust and hope in Jesus was shattered. He could not see a better way ahead.

Yet, he experienced a transformation or a revival or a rebirth of his faith; a renewing of his hope when encountering with the risen Jesus. Like Peter, despite the negativity of Thomas's situation, the resurrection of Christ gave him hope to move him from doubt to belief; hope that turned his fear and cynicism into faith; hope that picked him up from grieving in isolation to standing with confidence and joy to proclaim the grace of God in Christ to others. The internal eyes of Thomas, the eyes of hope and faith, were opened after encountering Christ and hearing him say, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who not seen and yet have come to believe" (Jn. 20: 29).

This resurrection hope can change the way we respond to God and others. This was what the author of 1 Peter was conveying to the fledgling churches in Asia Minor. As Gentile Christians (mainly slaves and women) they were at the very bottom of a society heavily influenced by Greek and Roman culture. Because of their faith in Christ alone and refusal to honour the family gods of their masters' and household (including the worship of the Emperor of Rome) they were seen as jeopardising community welfare; they were insulting civic religion. This made them very unpopular with the rest of their society

including members of their own family who were not Christian.

The believers were not only looked down upon, but also persecuted. In chapters 3 and 4, the writer encourages them about suffering as Christians for doing the right thing in holding onto their faith in Christ.

This is a letter of encouragement, intended to assure Christians that, no matter how bad their neighbours treated them, they were right to hold onto to their faith. They could trust God to help them persevere in their times of trouble because God had done the same for Jesus by raising him from the dead. This was their resurrection hope: “By his great mercy

he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3). Even though these Christians never witnessed the life, death and resurrection of Jesus like the Thomas and disciples had, the writer assures them that the result of their faith is still the same. “Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet. 1:8-9). The resurrection of Christ was the basis for the “rebirth” or the renewing of their belief system. Through the author’s encouragement

it also opened their internal eyes to envision a better way they could relate with others in their society despite the injustices and suffering they faced; even from their own families. Resurrection hope in Christ helped these suffering Christians see a positive way forward in their life into, as Peter says: “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (vs. 4).

We, too, need this hope. We need it because we are people who have hardships and who struggle in different ways; people looking for a better way forward in life. If only we could eliminate all the hurts in the world; all of the pain, grief and disappointments. But we know

life is not like that. As Christians, we also know that joy is sown in tears; that this inheritance, this salvation, this resurrection hope is born from Jesus' crucifixion.

Like the early Christians of in Asia Minor, we, too, have not witnessed the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. But his resurrection power and hope has continued to encounter countless people over the centuries. Our being here today is testament to this. We do not need to see Jesus in the flesh to know that our life can be, and has been touched or impacted by Christ. "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who not seen and yet have come to believe". Amen.