

Imagine yourself for a moment walking. A young woman reflects, but I truly think it could be from any one of us, and says, *"I've walked this path more than 100 times, winding into the mountains, through the orange of autumn, around grey winter skies, under storms, drenched skin, shivers down my spine. "How long will this grey season last?" I'd ask thorny bush as I passed. For months now, I've walked the first bend of the mountain. Just on the corner, I'd pass a thorny bush. For months now, she's been covered in grey spikes, dreary, untouchable, almost dead, a look of dread.*

*Until today, as I pass, perhaps for the 105<sup>th</sup> time, her prickly thistles have now transformed. She stands proud, a glow in bright yellow petals, shimmering in the sunlight. Her season has arrived.*

*There are times when I feel like a thorny bush. Dull, unremarkable, unnoticed, prickly, lacking the light of life. And there are times when the path I walk is stormy, grey, and troublesome. Once again, divine nature becomes my tender teacher... I look to the sunrise; the sun speaks hope. No matter what is going on in life, I trust the sun will rise. I have an unwavering expectation that night becomes light in the morning. Without question."*

The young woman continues, *"Look at our planet, look at humanity. How we suffer. We've seen wars, disasters, and pandemics of the past (and present). Still, we rise, and move forward; with hope and expectation, we shall prosper. The caterpillar turns into a butterfly. Thorns make way for petals. All in their season.*

*We all have our seasons. And if your season is not now, trust that it is on the way. Keep hoping, keep expecting. Hold your course; keep walking forward. Keep taking action. One step-at-a-time. One hundred walks and five. Your season to shine will rise. It is just around the corner."*  
(Karletta Marie)

Where does the good news of the resurrection, the power of resurrection, the living hope of Jesus Christ, fit into your story of life? How do you understand its ability to create new confidence and inject new meaning into your life? I ask this, because by its very nature as God's gift to us, the resurrection of Christ and all the power it holds and stands for, has the ability to change the headline of your life? It is the power of resurrection that changes things in season for thorny bush. It is the power of resurrection at work in the young woman. It is the power of resurrection that is at work in the author of our scripture text for today.

Who wrote this text in 1 Peter? His name was Simon or Peter, and he was one of the best friends of Jesus. Peter was someone who got caught up in the excitement of the moment, and who wants everyone else to feel that way too. He was bold, original, but also a little unfocused. One of the important things to know about Peter is that he failed. OK, you might be thinking. We have all failed. What makes his failure so important? Peter choked when it really mattered. If you talked to Peter about his biggest regret, he'd have to admit that at the moment when it really mattered, he denied Jesus, not just once but three times. He became a broken man. At the time of Jesus' trial and death, Peter lost hope in Jesus and in himself.

Fast-forward thirty years to when he wrote the words that we just read. He'd become a key leader in the church. Not only that, but he was filled with hope even when facing adversity. As Peter wrote these words, he and other followers of Jesus were at the margins of society. They were being maligned, falsely accused, and ostracized. They were being abused by overbearing bosses (2:18), threatened by unbelieving spouses (3:1, 6), and ridiculed by skeptical neighbors and associates (4:14). On the horizon loomed the possibility of a much more violent form of persecution (4:12–18). Within a short time, some of them would be imprisoned and martyred. Nero would accuse Christians like them for not only setting the fire in Rome, but of hatred against humanity. We later discover that Peter himself would be crucified upside-down. Yet, and this is very important, despite all the persecution, Peter still maintained hope.

What made the difference? What changed for Peter? Because there is no question the headline of Peter's life was changed. What was the key? The resurrection of Jesus gave Peter "living hope."

How? Is hope really that powerful? Hope in Jesus is? Hope in God is? Why? Because it's living. It has a life of its own. It's growing and increasing in strength, just like living things do. Whatever this is, it's something that's living and breathing. It's pulsing with life. And because it is a different hope than we might normally think. It's important to understand what Peter's talking about when he says hope. Hope isn't wishful thinking, like hoping that the Reds will win the World Series this year, or Virginia or Virginia Tech the College World Series, or Syracuse the National Lacrosse Championship. Sports are filled with uncertain wishful thinking. That's the problem with understanding what Peter is saying here. Usually, when we talk about hope, we're talking about a desire for a future thing that we're not sure we'll attain. That's not what Peter means. Peter is talking about something in the future that is guaranteed to happen based on something that has already happened in history.

That something that's happened in the past is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are skeptics who doubt it and historians who criticize it. Maybe you are one of those. Maybe you know one of those. Consider the witnesses though. Two thousand years ago, a group of women came to the tomb of Jesus to anoint his dead body with oil. Nobody expected that they would find anything except for a dead body. Instead, they found an empty tomb. Later they encountered the risen Jesus. Now, if one person encountered a dead person who came

back to life, you'd probably doubt their sanity. You wouldn't take it very seriously. But over 500 people encountered the risen Jesus over a period of forty days. And whatever happened in those encounters at that time was so powerful that it changed a bunch of skeptics and failures like Peter into fearless witnesses. The resurrection of Jesus changed the headline of their lives. And their lives aren't the only ones.

Charles Colson was Richard Nixon's righthand man during Watergate. In prison he became a Christian. Reflecting on the resurrection, he said this:

"I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned, and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible."

The resurrection happened. Our living hope isn't based on a wish or a myth. We don't follow Jesus for no reason. Nobody did. His early disciples certainly didn't. They followed Jesus because he rose from the dead just as he said he would.

One person writes, "The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, when you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live." (Wolfhart Pannenberg)

Peter was about as hopeless as anyone has ever been. He'd watched his entire faith system collapse. He also lost complete confidence in himself. Peter had failed. Then he encountered the risen Jesus, and it changed everything. Peter the skeptic became Peter the unstoppable. There is a headline for you, "From Skeptic to Unstoppable."

The power of Christ's resurrection serves us at the core of our lives. Like the audience Peter was writing to, we are anxious as the world is changing before us in ways that we did not anticipate and do not clearly understand and, for the most part, are out of our control. How can we have the power of soul in times of great stress and anxiety not just to endure the evil day, but to be joyful and to fill our lives with the fruits of righteousness, with deeds of kindness, with projects of mercy, with labors of love? How, when your *life* is in jeopardy, or your job, or your marriage, or your health, or your respect in the community—how can you rise up with joy and bless those who abuse you and devote yourself to labors of love? To busy yourself for love's sake takes power in the very best of circumstances. But to spend yourself in love to others when your own life is falling apart, that takes a power of soul which is utterly beyond us. If that is what we are called to do, then the power has to come from some source greater than the human soul.

Andy Crouch said: “Human beings can live for forty days without food, four days without water, and four minutes without air. But we cannot live for four seconds without hope.”

Peter writes and we can own it, “The power of Christ’s resurrection gives us new birth and a living hope. Our inheritance is being protected by the power of God, even if now we have to suffer for a little while.” Our past and present trials serve to strengthen our faith. This is not to say that suffering is necessary to produce genuine faith. It is simply an acknowledgment that trials can reveal the beauty of our faith, just as fire reveals the beauty of gold.

“In spite of our current circumstances, our suffering, or our anxieties, the resurrection of Jesus still fills our lives with the possibility to ignite our hope and renew our faith.”

(Jennifer Kaalund, Ass. Professor of Religious Studies)

Because of this living hope, we can know for certain that our future is bright in the hands of God. Because of this living hope, we can change the headline of our life- like thorny bush, like the young woman, like Micah Tyler, like Peter. Brothers and sisters in Christ, our season to shine is rising. Glory be to God, Alleluia, Amen.