

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Easter 2 – April 24th and 27th, 2014

1 Peter 1:3-9

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Dear chosen people of God,

How can you be sure? Who doesn't want an answer to that question! There are so many times in so many areas of life we would love to have that answer. Is this the right school for you to go to? Will this relationship be "the one"? Will this career move work out? Will the treatment work out as the doctor said? How can you be sure?

Peter was not so different from you. Chosen as an apostle, hearer of parables, witness to miracles, he had just gathered up a basketful of fish and bread after thousands had eaten their fill. Remember how he was in a boat struggling against the wind and waves to gain the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had stayed behind to pray so he was not with them. It was the darkest part of the night when Peter caught a glimpse of a figure on the surface of the water. Was it a spirit of some kind? But then he heard Jesus' voice, "Don't be afraid; it's just me!" But how can you be sure? Peter says, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." And he says, "Come!" How do you do this? Will you sink in? Will you lose your balance? Can you really do this? How can you be sure? But Peter steps out and steps again and again and again toward Jesus. Then the wind roared. Then the waves rolled. Then Peter was not so sure anymore and he began to sink. But Jesus caught him and said, "Why did you doubt? I told you to come; what reason did you have to be unsure?" Peter learned this lesson firsthand and found the answer to this question the hard way. In the opening words of his first letter, he shares what he has learned with us. Let us listen to find the answer to all the times we also ask,

Theme: How Can You Be Sure?

- 1. Trust in God's mercy**
- 2. Trust in God's promises**

If we want to be truly sure of things, we must look to someone or something other than ourselves. As sure of himself as he might have been when he stepped out of that boat, Peter discovered that certainty did not last very long. You can look for assurance in any number of places, but Peter tells us the only reliable place to look is to our God.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" he begins. These are the very first words in the letter after his greeting. Usually in the Bible, God's penmen build up to such a glorious statement of praise. But, Peter jumps right to it before mentioning anything else. Why does he that? Before we can even ask "How can you be sure," Peter reminds us of the great things our God has done for

us already. Peter goes on, **“In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”**

Let’s take some time to think about a few of these things. **“In his great mercy,”** God acts for us. “Mercy” is “to show care or concern for someone in serious need.” It is the seriousness of the need that brings this feeling and the desire to help. Can the Lord really be talking about me in such great need? How can I be sure? The great need we have is sin. The Bible clearly says, **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** [Romans 3:23] “All” means all, you and me included. Because of our sin, we were born into this world spiritually dead. We needed to be born again.

So God acts for us. **“He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”** Paul says it this way in Ephesians 2, **“God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.”** For most of you, this birth took place at your Baptism. There you were connected to Jesus’ death and resurrection. There you crossed over from the death of unbelief to the life of faith. There you were born again. This new birth gives you a living hope, which means you are looking forward to the Lord fulfilling a promise he made to you. What is that promise? What are you waiting for? **“An inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade!”**

2. Trust in God’s Promises

Still there is more! God first promises he will protect and preserve your inheritance. It will be **“kept in heaven for you.”** Your God also promises he will protect you. He will use his power to shield you. How can you be sure? Is God strong enough? Who is stronger? Does he ever fail to keep his promises? He will not fail to keep this one either. You can trust him. Notice the goal of God’s protection: Salvation! We have already seen so much accomplished in Jesus’ life, death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead. One day God will reveal every detail of his plan. Those things we cannot see now will become clear when God delivers us from sin and death once and for all, when he brings us to our inheritance: a home in heaven.

All of the things Peter mentions are absolutely sure and certain. Notice none of them come from our own achievements. They are all God’s doing. He does it from his mercy and grace. They are all gifts of his love. He is not selling them. We don’t have to try to earn them so he owes us something. In love, he gives and he gives them to you.

By starting his letter this way, Peter is leading us to an answer to the question, “How can you be sure?” God has done all these things just as he said he would. When the Lord promises, he will do it! You can be sure of it! Now let’s consider what Peter tells us the Lord has promised he will do for us. Peter goes on, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” All the blessings God gives us are a continuing source of joy for us. But Peter also reminds us God has not promised us heaven on this earth. He recognizes we will have to endure periods of grief and trial and suffering. We experience such things in many areas of life: plans failing, relationships struggling, finances faltering, health deteriorating, former certainties wavering. They have come and will continue to come. Again the question rises in our minds, “How can you be sure about any of these things?”

Peter gives us an answer, **“These have come so that your faith...may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”** When hardships come, your Father in heaven has a loving purpose in mind for you through them. He is in control over such things too. He will see that they have their limit. They will only last “for a little while” and then the light will shine again.

The Lord may use them to any number of different purposes for your good according to his plan, but one purpose common to all of them is this: **“Your faith may be proved genuine.”** What does Peter

mean? Well, what is faith? It is confidence in a promise from God. How does faith prove itself to be real, genuine faith? Peter says, "In spite of the grief and trial and suffering, in spite of all outward appearance to the contrary, you cling to God's promises for you. God says he will limit temptation and provide an escape from it. God says he will work all things for your good. God says in his love he will always do what is best for you. Do you trust him to keep his promise? Do you believe what he says, or will outward appearances dissuade you? Chosen people of God, you can trust your Lord! You can be sure when promises something to you, whatever that may be!"

What is the result of such genuine faith, of clinging to God's promises? **"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."** As you cling to God's promises, you see what he has done, and continues to do, for you. It inspires a response of love. It brings you to an ever more firm and certain confidence in the promises he makes. Even when you can't see him, or the final results, so clearly, you know even this hardship will work out for your good because he has promised it would. As you focus on him and his promises, those visible distractions begin to disappear. Self-pity, complaining, envy, and all those things begin to fade as the Spirit replaces them **"with an expressible and glorious joy."**

With Confirmation Sunday next Sunday, it is fitting to think about our promises to God. We are right to take them seriously. They are an accomplishment to be proud of. But much more important for us is that we concentrate on God's promises to us. They are the source of our **"living hope,"** our **"inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade,"** **"the salvation our souls,"** which find their greatest witness to the truth in **"the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."** We must bind ourselves to them. We must hear them again and again. We must cling to them, not just today, but every day of our lives.

In him and in his Word, you find your certainty and assurance for every circumstance in life. In him and in his Word, you find the answer for every question those circumstances in life raise. How can you be sure? Because God has promised! May you never tire of hearing him speak those promises to you! Amen.