

More than enough: Jesus 7. A Living Hope
Matthew 28:5-7, 1 Peter 1:3
Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020
Pastor Steve Richards

In the early 1990s, a clothing line was introduced with this logo: No Fear. The clothing featured slogans that touted the virtues of extreme sports - like motocross racing, snowboarding and surfing. The t-shirts carry such fear-defying slogans: Fear, just another 4 letter word; Face your fears, Live your dreams; It will invade your dreams, it will shatter your reality, it will dominate you, if you let it. No fear. But we don't need extreme sports to know something about fear. Fear, we know. We feel it. We live with it and we try to run from it. There is a survey of things people are most afraid of – this was taken before the current COVID19 crisis - and 70% responded that one of their greatest fears is public speaking. I know something about public speaking. I'm terrified every time I stand here. I'm not here this morning because I have no fear. Fear is what brings us to Easter.

On that Friday 2000 years ago, from 9:00 in the morning to 3:00 in the afternoon, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus stood by the cross as Jesus was crucified. Only one disciple, John, stood with them. The other disciples watched from a distance too afraid they might be caught and be next to be crucified. Roman crucifixion was one of the most horrific forms of capital punishment ever devised. It was used to send fear into the people they oppressed. Nailed to the cross, it was a slow and agonizing death. It took six to eight hours. Death came not from the nails but asphyxiation as fluid filled the lungs. From time to time on that Friday, Jesus spoke. When he was offered wine to deaden the pain, he refused so he would be fully conscious and able to speak. Drawing from psalm 22, the psalm of dereliction, he cried: **“My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”** According to the gospel of Matthew, moments later he took his final breath, and it was finished. Taken down from the cross, his body was hastily cleaned and placed in a borrowed tomb – a heavy stone rolled in front of the entrance. As far as anyone knew that was the end. The tomb was the end. It was the end of hopes and dreams. For the followers of Jesus this was the darkest moment of their lives. The disciples went into hiding and all day Saturday they cowered in fear, wondering what would happen to them and overwhelmed with grief. All of their hopes and dreams were crushed. They had put everything they had into following Jesus. They had left their homes and families and jobs. They could not go back. They could not go forward. They were frozen in time. Fear does that.

I think of those of you who are going through tough times right now. Most of us are not experiencing the COVID19 virus. We are doing everything we can to avoid it – and that is having significant financial consequences for most of us. You may be without income, facing bills that you cannot afford to pay. You are not at all sure what that means for your future or for your family. Some of you have credit card balances so high you cannot even cover the interest charge each month. Your life has been about getting what you want when you want it, and now everything seems so uncertain. What do you do? How will you make it? For some of you, your spouse may leave you in the next year. Who am I without my spouse? How will I survive that? Some of you will find that you have a life threatening illness. Some of you will lose your jobs. And this is life. We don't need to listen to the news to be afraid – there is enough in our lives and in the lives of people we care about. We know what it is to be afraid. Some nights we can't sleep we are so anxious. With Jesus, we cry out: My God, my God why have you forsaken me?

Early Thursday morning, I was at home working on this morning's message, and I kept hearing a thumping noise in the next room. I knew that no one else was in that room. Amanda was still

asleep and so was our dog. But the thumping noise continued – and finally I went into the next room to investigate. A bird was flying into the window over and over again. It was attacking what must have been its own reflection in the window. The fear was real. Strike the window enough times. Strike it hard enough and the fear would defeat the image the bird saw in the window. And yet, from the other side of the window, how could I communicate “No Fear” – how could I tell the bird there was nothing to fear? Maybe it takes becoming a bird to do that! Isn’t that what God was doing? Maybe if I take on flesh and become one of them! I could communicate with them in a way they would understand. No fear.

At sunrise on Sunday morning, the two Marys make their way to tomb. They come to finish the burial preparation, hoping to find someone strong enough who will remove the stone. This was not a happy task but the least they could do for Jesus was give him a proper burial. Walking toward the tomb, what they see brings forth even more fear and pain. The stone has been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. Couldn’t they leave his body alone? Wasn’t it enough that he was crucified? Must they desecrate his body also? Fear on top of fear. From the other side, what did the angel say? No fear.

For that to happen, you’ve got to **recognize where you are**. Where were they? The women were **standing on holy ground** and they did not know it. Facing the tomb, facing their fear, hearing the angel message – lo and behold the tomb was empty. Recognize where you are. Last week I turned to the story of Elijah, one of the great heroes of the Old Testament. If you are not familiar with Elijah, look up the story in 1 Kings 18-19. Elijah was serving God and he single-handedly brought a nation back to God. The people had forgotten who they were. They had forgotten that God was with them. So Elijah went to Queen Jezebel. She was the one who led them away from God in the first place, but Jezebel refused to listen to Elijah, refused to believe that God existed, and instead threatened to kill Elijah. And Elijah was afraid for his life. He ran as far away as possible. He went into the desert, hid under a bush and cried out to God – I’ve had enough – I can’t do this anymore – Just let me die. But to Elijah’s surprise God was already there – right there under the bush in the desert. God lifts him up and Elijah is able to keep going. Remember **right where you are – God is**. But Pastor Steve, you don’t understand. I’m in so deep that even God can’t help me. Remember the story of Joseph who was thrown in a pit and sold into slavery. But God was with him and Joseph went on to become a successful leader. But Steve, you don’t understand I’m going through fire right now. Remember the three friends of Daniel (Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego). They were thrown in a furnace of fire, but there appeared a fourth one in the fire – guess who? Mary and Mary run from the cemetery of their fears and who do they meet. Who is with them? None other than the risen Christ. Recognize the holy ground on which you are standing. God does his best work in cemeteries.

1 Peter 1:3, Peter wrote this: **On account of his vast mercy, God has given us new birth. You have been born anew into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.** Who was Peter? He was one of the disciples who heard what the Marys had experienced, ran back, saw the empty tomb, and would see the risen Christ for himself. What does it mean to Peter (who denied three times that he knew Jesus, who watched the crucifixion at a same distance, who locked himself in a room afraid that he would be the next to be crucified) – What does it mean to Peter that Christ is risen? A new birth, a fresh start, a living hope. John Wesley said of this verse: It is the kind of hope that revives the heart and makes the soul lively and vigorous. Do you need that kind of hope? Without hope we will not survive. What is your source of hope? Is it your job that gives you hope. You know what’s happening to jobs. You have no idea when the layoffs will come. Or maybe you’re not concerned about a job. You don’t need a job. You have investments – or had investments. Some of us put our future hope in a 401k only to discover that’s not where hope is found. Is your hope found in a relationship?

What happens when that relationship fails or comes to an end. Then what? What if your hope is in your health? What happens if the unexpected happens and you face a life-threatening illness. Then what? Or maybe your hope is in your cognitive ability. You are smart. People know you are smart. You figure things out. You have degrees that cover the walls of your office. How old are we when the mind fails us? Where is your hope? What will sustain you if not Jesus Christ? You need a living hope.

The resurrection is God's shout to the world – trust me. I can sustain you. There is hope. There is always hope. You can make it without everything you want. You will discover life is not how you had it planned. Maybe you will end up alone, but that's okay. You will survive and even thrive. There will be another job. It may not be what you thought and may not pay what you thought but you will make it – if you let God in. Let God sustain you. God offers a living hope.

When our children were in preschool, they would ask me to take them to chutes and ladders. I don't think I've been there since those days, but I assume it's still there at Hyland Park in Bloomington – an amazing array of slides and ladders. And I would go with Lauren and Bethany and we had great fun together. I'll never forget. There was one slide. Lauren wanted to go down but it was long and was a tunnel and from the top of the slide she could not see the bottom. Daddy catch me. I will, Lauren. I will catch you. But Daddy I can't see you. Trust me. Let go. And I'll catch you. And when she let go and came through the chute her body was tense with fear but when she saw that I was there to catch her, her face immediately turned to joy.

In Jesus Christ, we have a living hope. I don't just believe that, I'm counting on it.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 12, 2020

Weekly Prayer: Resurrecting God, the tomb is empty! Christ lives! Easter news is good news! We are glad to be alive and grateful for your love that will never fail us. We are listening intently for your voice. Fill us with incredible joy, everlasting peace, and unquenchable hope this day and always. Amen.

Monday, April 13

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-5, Deuteronomy 30:19, Philippians 4:13

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the tomb. Look, there was a great earthquake, for an angel from the Lord came down from heaven. Coming to the stone, he rolled it away and sat on it. Now his face was like lightning and his clothes as white as snow. The guards were so terrified of him that they shook with fear and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Don't be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

I call heaven and earth as my witnesses against you right now: I have set life and death, blessing and curse before you. Now choose life—so that you and your descendants will live

I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength.

Observation: The reading from Deuteronomy is part of Moses' farewell address to the people. They have a choice. The apostle Paul has already made the choice. In Christ, he has a power not possible otherwise. And that's what the women who approach the tomb of Jesus on Easter morning would ultimately discover. To live with an Easter faith we must stop fear from controlling our actions. We will have different fears come and go in life. The key is to recognize

the fear but act in faith. If we allow fear to determine our decisions and actions, we will never live the life God intends for us. In other words, you will lose life. Hope is belief in the positive outcome and committing to the resulting actions to achieve it.

Application: Consider a time when fear paralyzed you from doing what you should have done. When you took a risk and trusted in God, what happened? And if, in that moment, you did not trust in God, what kept you from doing so? Read again Philippians 4:13. For Paul, what is the key?

Prayer: Thank you, God, that you raised Jesus. That single fact has been passed through the centuries, and now I am the recipient of the eternal hope that nothing will ever separate me from your love. Let that hope live within me each day. Amen.

Tuesday, April 14

Scripture: Matthew 28:6, Genesis 28:16-17, Genesis 39:2

He isn't here, because he's been raised from the dead, just as he said. Come, see the place where they laid him.

When Jacob woke from his sleep, he thought to himself, The LORD is definitely in this place, but I didn't know it. He was terrified and thought, This sacred place is awesome. It's none other than God's house and the entrance to heaven.

The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man and served in his Egyptian master's household.

Observation: In Genesis 28, Jacob was preparing to face his greatest fear and was surprised that God was with him. He was on holy ground. Joseph was facing his greatest fear and God was with him. The women at the tomb did not know it yet, but they were standing on holy ground. In controlling fear, we must also recognize that we are standing on holy ground. Wherever you are today, in the struggle, in despair, in fear of the future (wherever you are), you are in the right place at the right time - because where you are, God is! And God will bless you and use you for great purposes if you don't give up or give in.

Application: When have you recognized God's movement in your life? Think of a particularly tough situation in your life when God was moving. How can you claim faith right where you are today?

Prayer: Amazing God, you are always acting in this world, forever pointing us in a direction that will bring us closer to you. Help me to pause in this day to consider how you are acting – usually through the actions of others – in this world today. Amen.

Wednesday, April 15

Scripture: Matthew 28:7, Colossians 1:27

Now hurry, go and tell his disciples, 'He's been raised from the dead. He's going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.' I've given the message to you."

God wanted to make the glorious riches of this secret plan known among the Gentiles, which is Christ living in you, the hope of glory.

Observation: This living hope found in Easter is meant to be shared. Much to the surprise of many of the earliest Christians, Jesus did not come for Jews alone – but for Gentiles also. Not only did the angel show the women at the tomb that they were on holy ground, he commissioned them to go and tell others about Jesus’ resurrection. We experience the depth and power of the resurrection when we tell others and serve others. The only way others will see God and know Jesus is through you and the hope that God has placed in you.

Application: How has claiming God’s purpose in your life helped you deal with fear and anxiety? How has serving God helped you get past living solely for yourself? This could be the day for you to make a commitment to serving others. Go to www.messiahchurch.org and click on “Make an Impact.”

Prayer: Risen Christ, your light shines in this world. Use me to invite others to see your light and find ways that together your light will shine through our actions. Amen.

Thursday, April 16

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Hebrews 11:1

So we aren’t depressed. But even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day. Our temporary minor problems are producing an eternal stockpile of glory for us that is beyond all comparison. We don’t focus on the things that can be seen but on the things that can’t be seen. The things that can be seen don’t last, but the things that can’t be seen are eternal.

Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don’t see.

Observation: To keep fear at bay, we must live life focusing forward. The key to this is not to focus on the past – not because there are not significant past experiences that can empower us, but because God’s best days for your life are before you. Don’t get too comfortable with the present. We can’t stay here. Life does not remain the same. Following Jesus means committing to go wherever he might send you, whenever he might call you.

Application: How does looking forward instead of back help you overcome fear and anxiety? Where in your life do you need to move forward and live in the situation God has placed you instead of looking back? Are you too comfortable right now? How will you move forward in God’s purpose for your life?

Prayer: Creator God, I am grateful the faithfulness that you have shown in your presence throughout my life. Where you lead, let me follow. Grant me the wisdom to choose your way and rest secure that you will remain faithful. Amen.

Friday, April 17

Scripture: Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Peter 2:7

Give thanks to the LORD because he is good, because his faithful love lasts forever. Let Israel say it: “God’s faithful love lasts forever!”

The LORD was my strength and protection; he was my saving help! The sounds of joyful songs and deliverance are heard in the tents of the righteous: “The LORD’s strong hand is victorious! The LORD’s strong hand is ready to strike! The LORD’s strong hand is victorious!” I won’t die—no, I will live and declare what the LORD has done. Yes, the LORD definitely disciplined me, but

he didn't hand me over to death. Open the gates of righteousness for me so I can come in and give thanks to the LORD! This is the LORD's gate; those who are righteous enter through it. I thank you because you answered me, because you were my saving help. The stone rejected by the builders is now the main foundation stone! This has happened because of the LORD; it is astounding in our sight! This is the day the LORD acted; we will rejoice and celebrate in it!

So God honors you who believe. For those who refuse to believe, though, the stone the builders tossed aside has become the capstone.

Observation: This psalm is known as the Great Hosanna (the Hebrew word hosanna means "Lord, save us"). It is a hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance from enemies. Note verse 22. The "stone" was likely a king that other empires had rejected, but that king had become the cornerstone. In the New Testament, Peter would remember this verse when writing about Jesus.

Application: In the moments of life when we are challenged and fear-filled, we must have something to hang on to. What do you hang on to? What is your cornerstone? How has Christ become that cornerstone for you (or what would it take for Christ to be your cornerstone)?

Prayer: Eternal Spirit, move within me this day so I will know the power of your presence. When I am filled with doubt and weighed down by the uncertainties of life, remind me that the hope you offer can free me to see a better tomorrow. Amen.

Saturday, April 18

Scripture: John 20:19-31

It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you don't forgive them, they aren't forgiven."

Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn't with the disciples when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, "We've seen the Lord!" But he replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won't believe." After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!" Thomas responded to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus replied, "Do you believe because you see me? Happy are those who don't see and yet believe." Then Jesus did many other miraculous signs in his disciples' presence, signs that aren't recorded in this scroll.³¹ But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.

Observation: Today's reading took place on Easter evening. Jesus appeared to his disciples, who gathered behind closed doors. He gave them a greeting of peace, showed them his wounds, and breathed on them, conferring on them the Holy Spirit before sending them on their mission. A week later he will appear to them again, this time with Thomas present. Thomas asks to see Jesus' wounds, and, when Jesus agrees, he professes his belief in Jesus as Lord

and God. Jesus pronounces a blessing on all who have not seen and yet believe, and the Gospel's author makes an appeal to the reader to believe.

Application: Easter Sunday was a week ago. What did you do that made it a special day? As much fun as chocolate rabbits and glazed hams are, they aren't the central point of Easter. Maybe these days of social distancing have given you reason to ponder what is of greatest value. How has the hope of Easter extended through this week? Every morning can be Easter morning.

Prayer: Take quiet time today to consider ways you can allow the living hope of Easter and the full meaning of Jesus' resurrection to be part of every day.