

Easter Sunday 2015

1 Corinthians 15:19

“Resurrection Hope! Why Believe?”

Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church

Could I get a volunteer to help me with something today? I need someone strong, bold, willing to take a risk, full of hope, and not afraid of a challenge. And if I can't get all that, maybe just someone who's hyped up on Easter candy and not thinking straight!

Here's what I'd like you to do. Just jump between this pylon and this one. Think you can do that? Too easy? Then let me move it a little farther apart. Are you ready now? Don't think you can do it? Need help? Any ideas? There's no way our volunteer can possibly jump that far, is there?

But what if God were helping you with this jump? What if God gave you a tiny push with his little finger? Then could you jump that far? Could you jump across the street? Could you jump to the moon, if God were helping you?

Let's forget about jumping from here to there, and let's talk about some things that are really important. Let's talk about the times in our lives when we face up to challenges that seem impossible. Let's talk about the dilemmas we wrestle with in our families, in our marriages, in our nation, and in our spiritual lives that seem to have no solutions. Let's talk about those times when we lose hope, because we don't know how to get from here to there.

Maybe you've got a science test at school this week. You've failed the last four science tests, and you just know you're going to fail this one, too. Maybe it's your job. The work is boring, your boss is a pain, and you're just tired of going through the same hassles day after day. Maybe you have a

loved one who's caught up in an addiction, and it's going from bad to worse. Maybe it's a family member whose quality of life is disappearing in a losing battle with cancer. Maybe all the news reports of terrorism and religious violence in the world are making you fearful for the life that lies ahead for your children and grandchildren. Sometimes we all find ourselves losing hope, don't we? How can we possibly jump from here to there?

Jesus' friends felt that way, I'm sure, after Good Friday. Their Lord has been killed on a cross. Their hopes have died, too, and their dreams are smashed. But then comes Sunday morning! Easter! Resurrection! The dead heart of Jesus starts beating. His dead lungs start breathing. His dead feet start walking. And soon his friends come back to life, too. Their hope is reborn! Their faith is renewed! Suddenly, their eyes are open to what God can do in their lives! The resurrection of Jesus Christ filled his followers with hope! And God wants, on this Easter Day, to fill us with hope, too!

You see, there's a power – a tremendous power -- that comes from hope. It's hope that makes life worth living, isn't it? When you're living with no hope – when you're caught up in all the headaches and heartaches of this world, without any hope for change or improvement – you're living in a bad way, aren't you? To live without hope is to live a discouraged, defeated, depressive life.

But hope is a powerful thing! Hope energizes! Hope invigorates and motivates! When you have hope, your problems don't all disappear. But hope helps you to see past those problems. Hope gives us the vision of a new day dawning, the promise of better times ahead.

This Christian religion of ours is a religion that's built on hope. When we put our faith in Christ -- when we teach our children to believe in Jesus -- we are able look past the scary headlines; to see beyond the family struggles, health concerns, financial worries, and all our human limitations. As Christians, we can face life every day -- and we can even face our dying day -- with hope.

Whenever I lead a funeral service, I always ask the people gathered to say the words of the Apostles' Creed, if they know them, or just to listen along. I always look into the eyes of the family members up front when we finish the Creed with these words. "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." And, so often, despite our grief and sadness, despite all the pain of loss, we smile a little and nod when we say those words, "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

That's hope, friends. Hope is a powerful thing. Hope helps make life worth living. Hope enables us to see beyond the harsh realities and the challenging situations that stymie us in this hard life. Hope points us to the help that only God can offer, and reminds us of the glorious life that is to come.

St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:19, "If we in Christ have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." In other words, if Jesus just died on the cross, and that was the end of the story, that would be the saddest story of all. If we pinned our hopes for safety and security on a Savior who died and was buried and stayed there, then we would have no reason to hope, would we? We'd have no basis for faith. We'd have no reason to be hopeful about anything!

But Easter changes everything, doesn't it? The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! There is no greater hope than

the hope of the resurrection! Ours is a religion built on hope. Our church bears the name "Hope." Our Easter worship is joyful because Christ's victory gives us hope. And our lives can be lived with hope, every single day.

We may not be able to jump from here to there, or to resolve every challenge happily. But no struggle we face can ever take away the hope Christ gives us today. For we believe in the resurrection, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Let's stand and boldly proclaim our belief and trust in the Triune God, and in the resurrection that gives us hope.

*[Apostles' Creed]*