

Sermon :: 20-Apr-2025

Easter Day, Year C

“ The LORD is my strength and my song, | and he has become ... *my salvation* ”

When I say “Easter,” what are some of the *words* that come to your mind? [*pause a few beats*]
There are *many*, aren’t there? As we’re growing up, they might be BUNNY ... JELLYBEANS¹ ... FLOWERS ...
HUNTING, for eggs. As we get older and create families of our own, these might morph into a NEW
OUTFIT ... HAM (or maybe LAMB) ... LILIES ... *HIDING*, the eggs. And back in the day, they *used* to include
CORSAGES ... BONNETS ... and PARADES.

The *Church*, too, associates a lot of words with Easter: RISEN! ... JOY ... LIGHT ... EMPTY TOMB ... ALLELUIA!
And perhaps one more—*HOPE*: the JOYFUL HOPE of Christ RISEN from the EMPTY TOMB—ALLELUIA!

HOPE: It’s a word that’s a little bit *funny* ... a little bit *slippery*—even slightly *double-edged*—in our
mouths ... and in our minds. Sometimes, HOPE is a verb: “I HOPE *THAT* she gets the job”; “I HOPE *THAT*
they get married”; “I HOPE *THAT* he’ll call, one of these days.” As a *verb*, HOPE often places a lot of the
burden on *us* ... usually about something that hasn’t happened yet. When we HOPE *THAT*, we spend
lots of time and emotional energy wishing ... asking ... praying ... *THAT*, in time, events will unfold
exactly as we’d like them to ... even though there’s *nothing* we can do to make it so.

Nevertheless, we resort to HOPING *THAT* because, candidly, our human existence ... our slog through
this world ... is *tough*, isn’t it? Life ‘down here’ upsets ... disappoints ... alarms ... stymies ...
confounds ... saddens ... hurts ... grieves ... exasperates ... angers ... embitters ... us. Whether we
look across the kitchen table at a loved one in the throes of addiction or the grip of incurable disease
... whether our eyes pop open at 3:27 AM in a panic about how much money’s in the bank or if our
child will return home, safely ... whether, these days, we live in a constant state of tension because it
feels like the world is going to hell in a handbasket *or* because someone might louse it up, now that’s
it finally started going *right* ... there is *plenty* of reason in our lives—in *all* our lives—to do a lot of
HOPING THAT ... a lot of wishing and asking and praying that things will turn out exactly as we’d like
them to.

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When it’s a *noun*, however, HOPE is something we already *have* ... something we’re *blessed* with ... can
lean on and derive strength from: “I have HOPE *IN* his abilities as a father”; “I have HOPE *IN* my
doctor’s expertise, to get me through this”; “I have HOPE *IN* the moral judgment of my colleagues.”
When HOPE is a *noun*, it’s not a *burden* that *belabors* us ... but a *blessing* that *buoys* us. When we have
HOPE *IN*, we don’t work ... strive ... yearn ... to coax the future in a particular direction or bend it to fit
our specific design. Rather, we *realize* ... we *rely* on ... we *rest easy* in ... the truth we *already know*:
his loving engagement with the kids; *her* years of expert medical training and sound clinical
experience; *their* sense of fair play and doing right by others. And we *let* this truth—this HOPE *IN*—
carry us ... bear the weight of our anxiety ... set our course and color our thinking: our outlook on
life, and the world.

And on Easter ... *every* Easter ... we Christians celebrate the *ultimate* truth: our never-failing
provider ... our eternal source ... of HOPE-*IN* ... Who is the *Risen Christ*. For if ¶Good Friday ... Christ’s
death on the Cross ... procures God’s unconditional forgiveness of every wrong we’ve ever

¹ I choose this ‘word’ intentionally, as I’ve never been a fan of Peeps!

committed—or ever *will* ... and *frees* us, *forever*, from the burden of HOPING *THAT*, *somehow*, *someday*, we'll finally 'measure up' to God's standards (and, P-S, we never *will*!) ... ¶then *Easter* ... Christ's Resurrection from the dead ... gives us *HOPE-IN*: HOPE-IN we can *realize* ... *rely* on ... rest *easy* in. ¶HOPE *IN* ✓ Jesus' holding us ... entirely and gently, patiently and **irreleaseably** ... in the embrace of His love. ¶HOPE *IN* ✓ the Holy's Spirit's showering us ... always and abundantly ... with mercy and grace, strength and comfort ... to help get us through *anything*—indeed, **everything**!—life may throw at us. ¶HOPE *IN* ✓ the union ... the *relationship* ... the deep, beautiful, and infinitely generous **oneness** we have *now*—yes, **even now**!—with God, through Jesus' Easter rising again ... that *will* (I unconditionally *promise* you!) blossom into an eternity spent feasting on God's love and dancing in Christ's peace, without **limit** or **stint**.

For the '**best** news' of the *Good News* Christ came to share ... is that we already *have* ... we *currently hold* ... we're *blessed* with, in *this* lifetime ... the greatest, highest, loveliest, abiding-est HOPE-IN there is ... because Jesus—both fully human *and* fully divine—rose from the dead ... and *conquered* human death ... by making *His* all-loving, never-ceasing, infinitely-joyful relationship with God the Father ... **ours**, as well!² Christ is risen! Alleluia! And, in Him, **so, too**, are *we*! Alleluia, *Alleluia*!

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So, my message for you this Easter Day—this *HOPE* Day; this *HOPE-IN* Day—is this: When all of your HOPING *THAT*—the *verb* form of HOPE; the form that puts all the burden on us—gets to be too much ... when you begin to feel overwhelmed by all the wrongs you *HOPE* will be righted ... all the illness you *HOPE* will be cured ... all the darkness you *HOPE* will be brightened and limitations you *HOPE* will be removed, one day ... I invite you to pause ... take a breath ... and recall the HOPE-IN we have in Jesus, the Defeater of Death. Realize it ... rely on it ... and rest easy in it. And then *pray*: Give *Him* the burden of all your HOPING *THAT* ... and feast and dance, again and anew, in the glorious, gracious and all-sufficient HOPE-IN we have ... in our *Risen* Christ. For He truly *has* become ... *our salvation*! Alleluia!

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² Notice that Jesus tells Mary Magdalene that He's going to "My Father and your Father." This is the first time in John that Jesus says God is *our* Father, as well.