

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Christian's Unique Gift: Hope



LIFELINES

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Perhaps you have experienced it, too. Another Christian has gone through a crisis in his life. Through the comfort of God's Word, the presence of fellow believers and the encouragement of eternal promises, he has been sustained in his time of testing. Then he shares with you the observation, "I do not know how people without faith can handle situations like this? What hope do they have?"

The reality is that people who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ lack the gift that truly makes the difference. When Paul described the Ephesians before they came to faith, he said that at that time they were "strangers to the covenants of promise,

work the purpose for living, but what happens when one loses her job or lacks the strength to continue working? Others make sports their objective, but what results when the body no longer is agile and refuses to function athletically? Some put their family into the center of their existence, but how meaningful is life when a loved leaves or dies?

Please do not mistake me. Travel is wonderful. Working benefits both the laborer and those who use his products. Participating in sports

stimulates one's mind and challenges one's body. Loving one's family naturally pays many

incentive for going forward. Unfortunately when we reach them, we discover that they have not given as much as we had expected. They are limited in what they can actually deliver. They can't keep us going forever — and that's just what we need!

It seems that today the uncertainty of these earthly objectives is being pressed upon us more and more. Since 9/11 people know — and the news reports constantly reinforce with their accounts of violence, crime, untimely deaths, unexpected accidents, natural disturbances like hurricanes, fires, tornados and the like — that life is tenuous. That reality can make for anxious people!

Paul Gerhardt, the great Lutheran hymn writer of the

being protected by the power of God for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (I Peter 1:3-5)

Unfortunately, we can be lured away from this buoyant hope borne of Christ's resurrection and drawn into thinking

forgiven, put behind you! The empty grave and cross boldly proclaim that the future is yours. In light of that, as Paul says, "All things are yours!" (I Corinthians 3:22)

Soon the Easter festival will proclaim to us in dramatic

Jesus carried our lack of vision, our preoccupation with the present, our worries and anxieties about the future — in short, our sinfulness — to the tree, buried it in the grave and now announces that it is gone, forgiven, put behind you! The empty grave and cross boldly proclaim that the future is yours.

Jesus' resurrection shows us that the future is open — forever. That is a hope that will not disappoint us.

dividends. But do these pursuits fill the heart with hope that lasts, that gets us through death? Are they "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" that gets us into the inner shrine where Jesus has entered? (Hebrews 6:19f)



17th century, asks in one of his poignant hymn verses: "What at last does this world leave us But a hand full of sand Or some loss to grieve us?"

The unique gift God gives to the Christian is hope. This is no mere wish about the future, but something one can count on. Hope is sure since it rests on the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As Paul writes to the Romans, "We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. The death He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God." (Romans 6:8-10) Jesus' resurrection is the sign that death, the last enemy, has



Has this Lenten season been a time for us to take stock and discover anew how easily we get off track and let lesser goals replace the greater good of Christian hope? Have we recognized anew how we turn

fashion: "Christ is risen! Death has been defeated! Live with hope!" My confidence is that as we experience anew through our worship these grand truths which convey the unique gift that is the Christian's — the hope of the resurrection — we will realize how practical this all is:

Here is comfort for our losses, whether the death of a loved one, the loss of a partner through divorce, loss of employment, savings, or health! In spite of all that, the future is ours because of the hope we have in Jesus!

Here is power for facing the future! If Jesus' resurrection is the basis of our hope, then we know that God's promises are reliable. Jesus came according to promise, as foretold in Scripture, and true to His word, certified by His rising from the dead, He will come back again to receive His own unto Himself. Our resurrection awaits, of that we can be sure — an empowering truth for facing forward unafraid!

Here is cause for witnessing! We know how everything is going to turn out, but many people do not. They're scared, afraid, and anxious, uptight and worried. They are our opportunity to share the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

The hope we have through Jesus' resurrection gives us our mission. "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you." (I Peter 3:15) Through our witnessing we can bring hope to the hopeless!

As I see it, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead gives urgency to the "let us" of Hebrews 10: "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who has promised is faithful." The Lord has bound us together in the community of the church that we might keep one another full of hope — comforted by it, empowered to live confidently now, and encouraged to witness winsomely — because the basis of our hope is sure and certain: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!

Have a Happy Easter!



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having no hope and without God in the world." (2:12)

Without hope, what does one have to live for? Certainly there are things that one can pursue: the pleasure of travel, but what happens when traveling days are over? One can make

We need more than the short-term hopes that can keep us going for the time being. Looking forward to a birthday, completing a task, enjoying time with one's family, taking a trip are all worthy goals, and as we reach toward them, we find

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been conquered. Jesus' resurrection signals that life is eternal, for He cannot die again. Jesus' resurrection shows us that the future is open — forever. That is a hope that will not disappoint us. (Romans 5:5)




What is most beautiful is the good news that this hope is ours! In language which reminds us of our baptism, Peter shows how this hope really is ours: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By His great mercy, He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are

in on ourselves and so lose sight of the grand future God has in store for us? Have we become negative because our sights have been taken off the wonderful future God has promised to those who love Him?

My confidence is that our reflection has revealed not just our short-sightedness but has caused us to lift up our eyes to see a cross that is now empty. The One crucified there has completed His work. After He cried out triumphantly, "It is finished," He was laid in a tomb which too stands empty.

He carried our lack of vision, our preoccupation with the present, our worries and anxieties about the future — in short, our sinfulness — to the tree, buried it in the grave and now announces that it is gone,



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