

Revive Us Again

I Peter

Following on the heels of Easter, this series attempts to help us hang on to the glory that is Resurrection, to live into the inheritance that Peter tells us about in this letter. This epistle wrestles with salvation, rebirth, mutual love, suffering, and sin, and trying to come to a useful understanding. This understanding is essential for faith, but it makes sense only in the light of the Resurrection. Come and claim faith anew, deeper and stronger and able to hold us in difficult times. Revive us again!

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Week 1 – [1 Peter 1:3-9](#)

Indescribable and Glorious Joy

April 19

INTRODUCTION

The first Sunday after Easter has been called Low Sunday, even though those who call it that don't remember why. Maybe it is as simple as the feeling of coming down from the mountaintop experience of Easter. Maybe it's the slump we feel as we look out and see more empty seats than were there last week. It is hard to sustain the jubilant enthusiasm that Easter engenders. The musicians are worn out; the preacher is bleary eyed this week. The day is usually given over to Thomas (see Preaching Notes), the famous doubter. Last week, his hesitancy would have been unthinkable. But this week, he speaks for many.

It might be that a quieter, more reserved service would be welcomed in your space. Give the musicians the week off and give a meditation rather than a sermon; they'll thank you for it. Have the congregation in and out and back into the world as quickly as possible. That seems like the only proper response to Low Sunday.

But is it? Wouldn't a more faithful response on this second Sunday of Easter be to embrace the gift of Resurrection? To lean into the hope that new life brings? To call for the living one, unencumbered by the threat of death, to come and bring us life? Eastertide is a season of celebration, a season of embracing the proclamation of Easter. It is an embrace of life itself. Originally, the egg hunts were done after Easter, as a part of the celebration of Eastertide. It was a part of looking for life, you might say, and looking for the hope that has been offered. You've already done the egg hunt; most people do it before Easter even comes. But what about a redo? A Sunday morning search for life hidden among you?

"Revive Us Again" is a short series, the first three weeks of Eastertide, to remind us that the glory isn't done yet. There are times for contemplative worship, but Eastertide isn't one of them. Yes, the choir needs time to recover, and the pastor may be on vacation this week, but that doesn't mean the mood has to drop. Let

there be light and color and joy remaining. Let the flowers continue to decorate the sanctuary, if they are holding their bloom. The white and gold continue to cast their light on the worship services, supported by colors of every hue. Let the Resurrection banners continue to hang throughout the season; don't put them away too quickly. Easter continues this season, so let all of worship be a reminder of that glorious moment.

Eastertide is a continuation, but also an application. The proclamation still rings in our ears, Christ is Alive! This leads to the inevitable response, "Now what?" What does Christ's resurrection mean for us? How are we made alive again? How do we live into eternity, even as we continue in the world as we know it? How do we live as Easter people in a Good Friday world?

Eastertide services need practices to employ during worship so that they become habits beyond the walls. Use prayer stations, or bulletin inserts, or whatever can convey a sense of continuation, of a pattern of living that is shaped by the hope of Resurrection. "Revive Us Again" is a call to God to bring us that sense of Easter on an ongoing basis as we seek to be the church at work in the world.

PREACHING NOTES

As noted in the introduction, the Gospel passage for the second Sunday of Easter is Thomas (Well, the [Gospel of John and the story of Thomas](#)). And Thomas has his place, to be sure. He needs to see and touch; he's a modern-day skeptic and fits in well with our culture. Yet, we have chosen to set him aside this year and focus on something else – to focus on holding on to the exuberance of Easter and holding on to the Joy.

Just that? Joy? Nothing more profound? Just . . . joy? Well, yeah. But no. No, in fact, there is no such thing as "just joy." Nothing "just" about it, nothing insignificant, nothing easy, nothing "no big deal" about joy. It is central to the faith.

Really? Central? I thought that was love. Yes, it is. Two centers? No, one center, or central expression. You're right, it is love. But Paul's letter to the Galatians says that this central expression, this fruit of the Spirit, love, is characterized first by joy. It is the chief property of love—a joyous love. That's what we ought to have,

ought to exude, ought to live each and every day. And why not? We've got everything we could ever ask or imagine. "Our cup runneth over. The Lord is our shepherd; we shall not want." Do you hear how many verses point us toward joy? Read through the Bible (that was fun wasn't it? How long ago was that? Maybe time to do it again) and find every word telling us that we can be joyful; we ought to be joyful; we are given permission and encouragement to be joyful. And don't forget this text from I Peter, our epistle for the week.

First Peter is not a letter we read all that often. It's just tucked away toward the end of the New Testament, as though it were embarrassed to be included. "I'll just sit back here, out of the way, so as not to bother anyone," it seems to say. "Call me if you need me. But I hope you won't. Really." And why so shy? Besides the fact that Peter had been through the wringer and was probably a little skittish.

Well, this letter isn't really for us. Well, it is, of course, all of scripture is God-breathed and useful for building up. But it isn't. This letter was written when the church was under constant threat—when the benediction was spoken in a whisper because everyone knew when they gathered again that someone likely would be missing, caught up in the cleansing, in deportations and imprisonment. They were afraid that their neighbors might discover that they practiced a minority religion, a suspect faith, and that they might be turned in to the increasingly vigilant authorities who were out to make the nation safe. They were looked at with suspicion as they passed their neighbors on the street. They didn't feel safe in their own hometowns, their own places of work. They were, in fact, model citizens. They did jobs no one else would do. Christians were often the only ones who cared for the dead, who would treat the body as though it were something precious and give it a decent burial because they believed that life was bigger than what we could see with our eyes. But others thought they were just odd. And icky. And scary.

Questions began to be raised in the communities of faith. Should we go underground? Should we hide? Should we blend in, act like them? Would it be safer to pretend we aren't saved by grace through faith? Should we act as though we weren't asked to pray for our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, because it's risky and darned hard? The question was, "Should our faith move

inside: inside our heads, inside our hearts? Should it be a personal faith that keeps us safe and warm where it really matters in the imaginations of our inner life?"

This was the question Peter set out to answer in this letter. Let's be aware that there are some who don't think this letter was written by Peter. The timing is wrong, they say; the vocabulary doesn't sound like a Galilean fisherman. Besides, his name was Simon, not Peter. All that is true. And they're probably right. But, doesn't this sound like something Peter would do? If he didn't write it, then maybe he said it and later someone wrote it down and put his name on it. If he did write it, he probably did it without a sense of irony.

If the question "Should we hide?" is being addressed, who better than Peter to answer it? Peter professed his loyalty to his Lord with moral conviction and then ran like a scared bunny when things got heated. He claimed his steadfastness with loud protests, and then claimed to not know whom they were talking about when someone asked him about this Jesus. Of course, Peter would answer this question. He has been there. He understands the pull to save one's own skin. He has a grasp on reality; he knows what will work and what won't. He's as pragmatic as they come. So, who better? What do you say, Peter? Stay safe? By no means!

We'd need to study the whole letter to get the full answer, but we can catch a glimpse of Peter's spirit, even in these opening verses. A new birth is our gift. This new life is not based on our merits, not earned by the sweat of our brows, but by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That gift is ours, and nothing can diminish it. Nothing can snatch it out of our grasp. It is ours—as sure as the air we breathe, as sure as the light we see, as sure as the hope in our hearts. It is ours, this gift of life. This way of seeing ourselves and all creation around us: It is ours.

There is only one response to that. Only one. Rejoice. Yes, of course, rejoice. And there are times when it is easy rejoice. There are times when things are going well, and we can contemplate the fullness of the promise of eternity. Then, yes, we can look inward and rejoice and feel good about what has been given. We are content, satisfied. "Uh, no," says Peter, grinning in his beard, "You rejoice, even if now for a little while you suffer." Wait, what? Rejoice while suffering? That

doesn't compute. "I know, right?" says Peter. "But yeah, it really does. Here's the thing; you're alive." "I know", you respond, "and I'd like to stay that way."

"No," Peter responds, "alive. Not just living. You're ALIVE, which means that anything that happens is just a moment in eternity—just a blip on the screen. So, all those things that terrify you don't mean anything. They can't diminish you; they can't break you. You're alive. I didn't get that then. I get it now. All there is is love."

Peter laughs at his own thoughts: "Sounds like a pop song, doesn't it? But it's the truth, the deep truth. Love that starts with him, the one I turned my back on, but who never turned his back on me. Love of him who loves so deeply it shakes you to the core. Love so profound we are remade—made alive. Call it salvation; that's the only word that fits. We are being saved by his love, saved to love like him, saved to live like him. Does that sound like a party or what?"

His teeth gleam through that tangle of a beard, his weathered face wrinkling around his eyes as he reaches out with those big fisherman hands to slap you on the back. "Welcome to the party," he shouts a little too loudly. "Rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy." Amen, Peter, amen.

Week 2 – [I Peter 1:17-23](#)

Setting Our Faith and Hope

April 26

INTRODUCTION

Here's an odd thing. Have you noticed in this season how the preposition changed? It might not be something you've paid attention to, but there is a subtle shift in the way we talk about the season after Easter and the way we talked about Lent, for example. In March we named each Sunday as "___ Sunday in Lent." But now we name them as "___ Sunday of Easter." From *in* to *of*. But is this really such a big deal? Perhaps not, but there is significance to the change, and it is a significance worth noting in worship.

We are Easter people. That's what it means ultimately. The Easter event has changed our essence; we are "of Easter." **Of** Easter. We are **of Easter**. We choose to go through Lent; we find ourselves in Lent, a season of confession and repentance. But Easter finds us; it becomes us. We are Lenten people only for a short time and from a distance - at arm's length, but we are Easter people for all time.

So, how might our worship reflect this new, or renewed reality? With hymns that continue to declare that "Christ the Lord Has Risen today!" Not in some dim and distant past, but today. Not even in the yesterday of this season, but today. Resurrection is an ever-new reality, not a one-time event. It is who we are, not so much what we do or experience.

So, our hymns reflect this new reality, and our liturgy embraces who we have become, even while it acknowledges that we have not yet lived into our new skin – which means that confession sits comfortably alongside our alleluias. And even though admission of sinfulness is always painful because it reminds us how far we have yet to go before we embrace the essence of who we are as Easter people, we confess in confidence that there is grace available, even for us. The season "of Easter" is not a time for worm thinking! It is a time for claiming the gift of abundant life. It is a time of picking ourselves and one another up when we have fallen to get our feet back on the path toward the kin-dom of God (or back on the dance floor where we can express our joy in whose we have become).

All of which means that what you planned for Easter Sunday, you can continue to do in Eastertide. Again, look at the calendar, Sundays after Easter Sunday are called the Sundays **of** Easter. It's as if one Sunday can't contain all that Easter is about. You need a second Sunday of Easter and a third and fourth, fifth and sixth too! Those who stepped forward to sing or to dance or to read scripture or lead prayers should be used in this season too. The banners should still hang, and maybe even be processed! The colors should still be bright, vivid, vibrating with life.

We too often want to get back to normal, to the same old, same old. But that's the whole point of Easter; there is no same old anymore. Everything is new. We might be living in a Good Friday kind of world, but we are **of** Easter.

PREACHING NOTES

Just like last week, there is a comfortable familiarity in the lectionary gospel selection. Even though this is Year A, Matthew's year, the gospel text for this week is from [Luke](#). It is, of course, the story of the walk to Emmaus. It is a powerful story and surprisingly easy to relate to our twenty-first-century experience. We also walk with an unrecognized Risen Christ; we also are more aware of his absence than his presence. But when we catch a glimpse, we are likely to run miles to tell everyone we know that we have seen him, that he was revealed to us in the breaking of the bread, in the ordinary, mundane tasks of living in this world made more vibrant and alive because of that glimpse. It's a powerful story and certainly still worth telling.

But we're asking you to resist this year. Resist the familiar and let an old fisherman have a word. The epistle lesson walks us through this short Eastertide series called "Revive Us Again." Who better than Peter, the one who needed Resurrection almost as much as the crucified Jesus did?

Acknowledging the debates about the authorship of this letter, it is easy to see at least the spirit of Peter in this letter. He's hanging around the edges, it seems. And here in our text for this week he wants to talk about permanence. Ironical, don't you think? The rock that cracked under pressure is now contrasting the perishable with the unperishable. Or he is inviting us to be set in the unperishable rather than the perishable.

The letter begins with imperatives, four of them identified by Joel Green (*Feasting on the Word, Year A Volume 2*, p.413) and others. This is the third of those four. And it is an imperative to live in reverent fear. We all took a pause at that, didn't we? Fear as a motivator is at best a double-edged sword and at worst the source of all that is wrong with the faith today. So why would Peter or whoever wrote in his name use such a tactic—especially when you look at the other imperatives in this first chapter of the epistle? First, "believe in him and rejoice" (v.8). Second, "become holy in every aspect of life" (v.15). And fourth, "love one another deeply

from the heart” (v.22) All of which we can embrace wholeheartedly and proclaim powerfully. But fear?

“If you invoke the Father, the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile” (1:17). There are a lot of different ways we can approach this verse. On one level, it is simply saying “Don’t go around calling God your Father if you aren’t going to live as though God was your judge.” Take it seriously, in other words. Let it mean something, this relationship with the Almighty; something transforming; something encouraging; something that calls you up short when you venture too close to the edge of temptation.

Reverent fear isn’t about terror or terrorizing. It is about being aware of the implications of your actions, your choices, your words, your life. It is a way of saying that your life matters. So, Peter says, set your life in something that survives, something that matters, something imperishable.

Peter says an amazing thing in that perishable/imperishable bit of his argument. He says that you were ransomed from futility, not with perishable things like silver and gold, but with blood. At first glance, you might think he got the terms mixed up. What could be more imperishable than gold, for heaven’s sake? Even when currencies rise and fall, gold continues to be a safe bet for assets. But Peter doesn’t think so. His long-term planning has gotten really long-term. And even silver and gold won’t sustain you; it won’t last. What will last is blood – which means a relationship with the one willing to shed blood on your behalf, the one who shows you what really lasts.

Through him, the letter argues, we can be set in stone. Again, the irony is this argument about foundations comes in the letter that bears the name of the one called “Rock.” If anyone knows how difficult this is, it would be Peter. So, whether Peter wrote these letters or was the inspiration for them, there is a depth here that could only be lived experience.

“Through him you have come to trust in God” (1:21). Through him: Jesus came to introduce us to the God we thought we knew. And because Jesus said the Father and I are one, we began to realize, says Peter, that to trust in Jesus was to trust in

God. And then God did this amazing thing we call Easter. And now we know, that to put our trust in Jesus, is to set our faith and hope deep in the rock that is God.

That's important: faith set in God; not in our own ability to respond to God or in our own steadfastness, but in the consistency of God. It is important because without that understanding, the next imperative is impossible. This setting of faith and hope in God manifests in our lives as love. This relationship, this being embedded in the foundation of God, purifies your soul so that you can love. Pay attention to how Peter describes the process. This isn't love that you generate so that you can be a part of the foundation of God. We don't love our way into relationship with God. If that were the case, none of us would ever get there. And none of us could love like we're called to love. It is beyond our abilities. But because of the relationship that Jesus handed to us through his suffering, we can be purified enough to love. It is a response to, a result of the relationship with God, setting our faith and hope in God, that enables us to love. It is the outgrowth of that relationship.

That's what being "of Easter" means. We are made new in the Resurrection and enabled to love like never before. "You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God" (1:23).

Week 3 – [1 Peter 2:19-25](#)

By His Wounds

May 3

INTRODUCTION

What comes to mind when you hear the word "revival?" For some it might be a bit of nostalgia for a time past. Others might find it a negative, reeking of pressure and emotionalism. Still others might be scheduling their annual revival right now; they do still happen in some places, believe it or not.

Some understand a revival to be an internal event, designed to energize the folks in the pew week after week, something different, out of the box a little bit.

Maybe it's worship services on the lawn or in the parking lot. Maybe it's a themed

series over the course of two or three or more weeknights. A meal precedes perhaps, or dessert afterwards. It is a way to celebrate or emphasize community, to be reminded why we come together week after week. And above all, it is a way of putting our feet back on the path of discipleship.

Others will argue that revivals are supposed to be outward-focused events, that the tent in the empty lot was designed to be a way of including those who wouldn't be caught dead in a church building. And the church holding the revival was supposed to be the one doing the inviting and then the hosting; it was supposed to be on the lookout for those who haven't felt included. It was about people needing Jesus; it was about attempting to find an accessible way to bring folks to an experience of worship and faith. And it always ended with an invitation to discipleship. That may not have been the word that was used, but that was the idea. That in the revival we start, or renew, that journey with Jesus; to follow as we are being made and making others into disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world.

We called this series, which is standing the glow of Easter, "Revive Us Again," hoping that it would be a time for such renewal. And it might be a way of including others, an entry point into the life of the disciple of Jesus. So, we would like you, the worship planning team, to consider having a revival – maybe on this fourth Sunday of Easter; maybe for the whole series. But plan something that might jumpstart your congregation into becoming disciple makers again.

So, what makes it a revival? All kinds of things could be considered, but it comes down to two things: first is an invitation to discipleship, and second is the hospitality of a loving community of faith. The latter is one many churches are good at: that fellowship thing. Maybe plan a meal for after the service, a picnic if the weather suits, outdoors to make a witness to the wider community that this is a group of people who genuinely enjoy being together. But make it an open invitation, a street party that offers free food to any and all. But more than food, offer a warm welcome and an invitation to know more about what it is that makes the people of the church behave the way they do, which means that people need to be ready to give an "accounting for the hope that lives within them" as I Peter says later (3:15).

The only way we can hope to do that is to practice giving such an account. Maybe this Eastertide is an appropriate time to allow space for testimony during worship. Find those who can be articulate about their faith, or interview those who might not be quite so articulate and let them speak before the congregation. You might argue, but everyone in worship is already a believer. Maybe that's true. But worship is where we can rehearse telling our story, so it becomes a part of our conversation beyond the walls of the sanctuary. Tell your story, what Jesus means to you perhaps, or how faith has shaped your life. Find ways of allowing many to be heard, particularly those who aren't often given space to speak. Video-record people if they are too shy to speak before the congregation, but let the stories of the people be heard in worship.

The other element is offering a clear invitation to discipleship. Look in the front of the *United Methodist Hymnal* to find the order for Sunday Service. You'll find it always ends with a call to discipleship. Maybe your worship does that week after week; if so, congratulations! But many do not. The call to discipleship is, for some, an outmoded, emotionally manipulative "come to Jesus" kind of experience we grew out of in middle school church camp. It doesn't have to be. It can be a way of recommitting to a practice of faith that your church has adopted as your intentional discipleship system. It can be an open invitation to move from one expression of faith to another, one level of commitment to another. Now might be the time to encourage your congregation to look at what it means to belong, what membership is all about, and how we go about making disciples.

Eastertide is the reminder that we are made new in the resurrection of Christ. This is a perfect time to examine that newness and continue to grow in faith.

PREACHING NOTES

If you are committed to this series, then this week, you need a special blessing. It will be difficult to not just give this text a pass. [John 10:1-10](#) is a text that's easy to preach. You can go for a long time about the Good Shepherd; you can preach an amazing sermon on the abundant life in Christ, especially if you are going to lean into the suggestions in the Introduction and preach a revival. What better to invite folks to commit to than a relationship with the Good Shepherd and life abundant? Before you do, however, take another look at I Peter 2:19-25. Yes, it's

messy. And those verses have been the cause of a lot of bad theology. But that's exactly why it needs to be preached today.

The lectionary attempts to make it a little easier for you by lopping off verse 18. But then not really. It is lurking there behind the words that we do have. "Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh." What in the world are we going to do with that? It appears to many to be a tacit acceptance of the institution of slavery. Not to mention, and this does continue in the verses assigned, an apparent acceptance of abuse. "If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval."

That is why this passage needs to be preached. There are likely folks in your congregation enduring abuse right now who have somehow come to believe that God approves of their abuse, that they need to stay and "endure" in such a situation because that is somehow God's will. Surely, we can do better than that.

Dive a little deeper with the congregation to see what is being proclaimed in this passage. On the surface, there does seem to be this permission that is anathema to us today. But is that really the truth from this word? Abuse is not sanctioned; injustice is not approved. Endurance is. Endurance is another way of talking about faithfulness. It's about holding on. The Book of Revelation is full of the call to endurance, not because suffering is good, not because what is happening is a good we should perpetuate, but because it is a strength of character and a sign of faith.

We would have wished that Peter had spent more time trying to erase the kind of abuse that he references in this passage, this letter could have turned into a polemic against the institution of slavery and of trafficking. What the author of the letter chose to do instead was to provide hope in the midst of a difficult situation. But here's an important realization from our text: Many commentators talk about how Peter is referencing the household code. But he isn't, really. If he had been, there would have been a word to each of the categories, slaves and masters both. But there isn't. He talks only to the slaves. Why is that? The only logical response is that slaves were a part of the community, and masters were not. In other words, this isn't some abstract commentary on a household code

governing social roles in the culture in which this letter was written. It is, instead, a very personal letter to members of the community who were suffering from the injustice of a fallen world. This is an attempt to give hope and perspective and a sense of solidarity to those who might feel helpless and cut off. This is a pastoral letter and not a social justice one, except that the social justice is implied. It's possible to read into a text what we want to see there; that is true. But there is hope here, if we listen.

Of course, Peter compares our suffering with the suffering of Christ and invites all to that higher standard, not that we would ever achieve that height; but again, it is a sign of solidarity with all those who suffer. Again, the insight to celebrate is the inclusion of those whom society considered of no consequence, treated as property. In the faith, even slaves can represent Christ, Peter argued, can reflect the fullness of the humanity that Jesus glorified in his suffering. All were included in this family.

A case could be made that this was an individual response to an unjust system, and that the dismantling of the injustice is the task of the community as a whole and not borne by the ones suffering under it. So, comfort was offered, even as change was coming. But maybe that is more than the text can bear. The preacher's question this week must be, "Is it more than the church can bear in our broken world?"