

1 Peter 1:1-9 A New Birth into a Living Hope
April 12, 2026

Welcome to the second Sunday of the Easter season.

Back in the middle of the 1970s when I was a teenager, one of the most popular movie franchises was born. Star Wars was at first one movie, and we all loved it, and suspected there might be a sequel because at the end of the movie the evil Darth Vader had not been killed.

Sometime later, after the outline of the story was fleshed out and three trilogies envisioned, that first movie became Episode IV, and it was entitled, “A New Hope.”

Part of the human story is the constant descent into situations involving a need for a new hope. Perhaps it is better to say that people are simply always in need of hope. There is no rule that says we have to be this way, and pessimists and doomsayers abound. We could give up, with the conclusion that there is no hope. That would not be the biblical way. That would not be the Christian way.

The resurrection story for the day is the wonderful and interesting story of Thomas, one of the followers of Jesus, who was absent when Jesus appeared to the others on Easter day. He was notorious for his unwillingness to believe what he couldn't see.

It is possible to see Thomas as the first modern believer. It is the mantra of the scientific age that there is a natural explanation for everything, thus what can't be proved can't be true. It is a rather dubious assumption, that if accepted, would not lead to hope. As a matter of fact it would be impossible to live if one *only* trusted what could be proved. No one really operates that way.

Conversely, sometimes we act as though we believe that people in biblical times were gullible, somewhat superstitious, willing to believe anything if it was told them enough in a convincing way, even if it flew in the face of the obvious.

Thomas gives the lie to that notion. There is plenty of evidence to indicate that the people of Jesus' day were grounded in the realities of everyday experience and not likely to accept much outside of that experience. They were more modern than they are given credit.

Anyway, we have just as much difficulty knowing what to believe even *in* the present age. What does one do when the proof or evidence is absent, lacking, beyond human grasp, or not presented in a compelling way?

The affirmation of Jesus at the end of the story about Thomas is this, “Blessed are those who have *not* seen, *and yet have believed.*” That affirmation was also a prayer that Jesus prayed on the night of his arrest;

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who believe in me through their message . . .”

Today we celebrate this faith in the, at least by us, unseen resurrection of Jesus, who appeared to only a few, several hundred by the testimony of scripture, but has been believed by millions through the centuries since, and by billions presently.

This faith in the unseen resurrection is spoken very beautifully in the epistle reading for the day, which comes from First Peter.

He addresses the people in the church as resident aliens and strangers. He writes that though they are exiles throughout the regions where they lived, Pontus Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia, they are also God’s elect, chosen through foreknowledge, obedient to Jesus and sprinkled with his blood, like the altar after a sacrifice.

And Peter immediately turns to higher things. He speaks of a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He speaks of an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade, kept in heaven.

He goes on to acknowledge that we suffer trials in this earthy life, but not as something that defeats us, rather as a refinement by fire, as we await the arrival of the salvation . . . that will be revealed at the end. This precious refinement results, not only in a continual effort to better ourselves and the world, but also in

praise, glory, and love; and then he gives this benediction:

“ . . . Though you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy; for you are receiving the result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Life on earth has always been and is increasingly experienced as an estrangement, a separation on a number of different levels. The world of people is a divided world.

Some say there is an epidemic of loneliness in America, in the world. Perhaps it is caused by an addiction to various kinds of social media; or an obsession with popular culture or the world of politics.

But it is not a Divine Estrangement. The presence of God is all around us in every moment. We are not alone. As a matter of fact, goodness abounds too. As the scriptures teach in James 1:17, all good gifts come from God:

springtime and flowers, laughter and music, getting up in the morning and going to sleep at night; breathing; the sound of children playing . . . I feel like saying, “raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens, warm woolen mittens . . . reconciliations, new friends, old friends, any friends; problems solved . . . one can go on for awhile

There are actually signs that the decades long decline of church involvement and attendance is ebbing, as it were, bottoming out. Could it be that people are not happy in their unbelief? Or in their despising of organized religion? In their isolation?

What would life be like if we took to heart that, “every good gift comes from God,” so that instead of believing that we or someone else was the source of goodness, we believed that anytime something good happens, it is because of God’s mercy and grace, and affirms God’s presence. “The Lord is near.” Philippians 4:5. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof. Psalm 24:1 KJV.” We are surrounded by the love of God.

And the hardships? the trials? Even they are not without meaning. They are a crucible in which our character is forged and refined so that when the Kingdom of Heaven arrives we will be able to behave as its citizens, as if we belong to it, instead of stumbling around as if we did not know our bearings.

I am not sure what each of you believe about climate change science. Some are pretty sure things having to do with climate will be the source of doom for our planet, others that it is a hoax, even others somewhere in between. Whatever one believes, there is a new series on PBS that caught my attention. It is called, “Our New World,” and its theme is to look for places in the world where there are hopeful developments.

In the second episode, one such place is described. It is in the Glacier Bay region of Alaska and nearby Canada, where for the last several decades the glacier has been receding. I am not sure how many miles have been lost. But an unexpected development has given rise to hope. After more than 20,000 years under ice, the exposed terrain is coming back to life.

Forests are growing; animals are living with plenteous resources; grizzly bears, moose, wolves, beavers, you name it. Even the salmon, notorious for spawning in the same place they were born, have discovered a new place to spawn, and there is a stream carrying much needed organic life into the nearby ocean.

The narrator, though not claiming that the good outweighs the more destructive things also happening, concluded with one simple sentence, “*this gives me hope.*”

That is what Easter is - “A new birth into a living hope,” only its source is the resurrection of the incarnated Son of God, who brings mercy and love, and an inexplicable joy; and not a new hope, like in the movie, but the oldest of all hopes, that we have always known about because of the 131st psalm and others, which tell is in very certain terms, “Put your hope in the Lord, from this time forth, and forevermore.”

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