

Easter 5 - May 17, 2020

Pre-service Music 738 "Lord of All Hopefulness"

Opening Address

Hymn 645 "Built on a Rock"

- 1 Built on the Rock the Church shall stand
Even when steeples are falling.
Crumbled have spires in ev'ry land;
Bells still are chiming and calling,
Calling the young and old to rest,
But above all the souls distressed,
Longing for rest everlasting.
- 2 Surely in temples made with hands
God, the Most High, is not dwelling;
High above earth His temple stands,
All earthly temples excelling.
Yet He who dwells in heav'n above
Chooses to live with us in love,
Making our bodies His temple.
- 3 We are God's house of living stones,
Built for His own habitation.
He through baptismal grace us owns
Heirs of His wondrous salvation.
Were we but two His name to tell,
Yet He would deign with us to dwell
With all His grace and His favor.
- 4 Here stands the font before our eyes,
Telling how God has received us.
The altar recalls Christ's sacrifice
And what His Supper here gives us.
Here sound the Scriptures that proclaim
Christ yesterday, today, the same,
And evermore, our Redeemer.
- 5 Grant, then, O God, Your will be done,
That, when the church bells are ringing,
Many in saving faith may come
Where Christ His message is bringing:
"I know My own; My own know Me.
You, not the world, My face shall see.
My peace I leave with you. Amen." Text: Public domain

The Invocation: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Confession: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let us then confess our sins to God our Father. Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

The Absolution: In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake, God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ, He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer of the Day: Let us pray:

The First Reading is written in the book of Acts, chapter 17, verses 16-31

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.”

²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’” ²⁹ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in

righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

The Epistle Reading is from St. Peter’s first letter, chapter 3, verses 13 to 22.

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered^[a] once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which^[b] he went and proclaimed^[c] to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because^[d] they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

The Holy Gospel is according to St. John, chapter 14, verses 15 to 21.

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper,^[a] to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be^[b] in you.

¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

Apostles' Creed: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. 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. Amen

Hymn 655 "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word"

1 Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word;
Curb those who by deceit or sword
Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son
And bring to naught all He has done.

2 Lord Jesus Christ, Your pow'r make known,
For You are Lord of lords alone;
Defend Your holy Church that we
May sing Your praise eternally.

3 O Comforter of priceless worth,
Send peace and unity on earth;
Support us in our final strife
And lead us out of death to life. Text: Public domain

The Sermon: “The Hope that Lies within You” 1 Peter 3:13-22

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,
Amen.

Christ is Risen!
He is Risen indeed!
Alleluia!

The times when Peter wrote the words of our Epistle reading for today were not particularly good times for Roman Christians in the Early Church. They had fled the city of Rome, where they had grown up, where they had come to know the Gospel of Jesus, and where they had been formed into a worship community. They were no longer able to gather together with the brothers and sisters of their local church but were, instead, driven east and scattered throughout the area, which today we call “Turkey.”

The reason that these Christians had to leave their home is that a madman now controlled their city and the entire Roman Empire. That madman’s name was Nero, and history tells us that he was the first Roman Emperor to persecute Christians. Nero put Christians to death because they confessed Jesus as their God and Lord and would not confess him, Nero, as god and lord. Some sources report that Nero began persecuting Christians because he needed someone to blame for the Great Fire of Rome, which destroyed entire neighborhoods of the capital city of the empire. According to these accounts, Nero needed a scapegoat, because he, himself, ordered the lighting of the fire, as part of a deranged exterior decorating project gone wrong. Nero wanted to destroy Rome, rebuild it in his own image, and name it “Nerapolis” after himself. After the fire, the people and the Roman Senate began to ask too many questions, so Nero pointed the finger at the Christians.

Peter writes his letter to believers suffering the persecution and scattering that followed. If ever there were a hopeless situation, the Roman Christians seemed to be right smack in the middle of it. In his letter, Peter preaches into this situation, reminding the Roman Christians of who they were in Christ and what that meant for them living in a hostile world. For Peter, all of this has to do with baptism, as the event which has formed these believers into the people of God. Peter builds his whole letter, up to the focal point in our reading this morning: “baptism now saves you.”¹

¹ 1 Peter 3:21 (ESV).

Earlier in his letter, Peter tells the scattered Christians that they have been born again into a “living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.”² In baptism, the Roman believers have been reborn as a people with a new identity; they are now a people of hope. As a people of hope, they have been built together, as living stones, into a spiritual house for the worship of God. As a people of baptismal hope, the Roman Christians are God’s dwelling place, even when they are scattered and cannot gather together as a congregation.

Peter tells the Roman Christians that living as a people of hope means living as a holy people in a hostile and seemingly hopeless world. Living as a people of hope means not indulging in the same idolatry and sinful behaviors exhibited by their pagan neighbors. Living as a people of hope means not acting rebelliously against the government—even if the government is persecuting believers—but being submissive to the government and honoring the emperor, even if he is a crazy and murderous one like Nero. Living as a people of hope means living peaceably, even with those of one’s own family. Living as a people of hope means living uprightly when those around you in the world are not living uprightly.

Above everything else, Peter encourages the Roman Christians to live as a people of hope and testify to that hope in a way that is fitting for the baptized, holy, people of hope. Peter says: *“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”*³

Being the baptized, holy people of hope means proclaiming that hope, sharing it with others, even if proclaiming that hope brings suffering. After all, Christ suffered for His people while they were still sinners. Peter insists that, if the people of hope suffer, they should suffer for righteousness sake not because they are doing something wrong. They shouldn’t suffer for sinning, and they shouldn’t suffer for rebelling against or disrespecting their civil authorities. If the people of hope suffer, they should only suffer for proclaiming the hope that only comes through Christ.

The Christ who suffered for His people did so innocently. Jesus did not suffer for His own sins but for the sins of His people, for our sins. This is the hope that the people of hope are called to proclaim, just as Jesus, Himself, proclaimed after His crucifixion. The crucifixion was not the end; Jesus was raised to life again.

Christ is Risen!
He is Risen indeed!
Alleluia!

Peter says that Jesus, after He died for His people’s sins, descended into hell to proclaim the victory of hope over sin, the victory of His life over death. Jesus did not descend into hell to suffer. His suffering was finished on the cross. Jesus descended into hell to proclaim His salvation that conquers death and hell. The same Jesus who accomplished this salvation by suffering for believers now calls believers to bear witness boldly to Him, even if it means that they suffer for it. Suffering may come to the people of hope when they proclaim that hope.

² 1 Peter 1:3 (ESV).

³ 1 Peter 3:15-17 (ESV).

But suffering is not the identity of the people of hope. Even if suffering comes, the people of hope are not defined by it. Instead, the people of hope are defined by the salvation that Jesus brings. Just as God saved Noah and his family from the Flood through the ark, God now saves His people through the waters of Holy Baptism. In baptism, Christ claims His people as His own, washes away their sin, makes them holy, and puts them as living stones into his building of the Church.

Christ accomplished that work through baptism for the Roman Christians of Peter's generation, and, brothers and sisters, Christ does the very same for His people today. Christ does the same for me and for you. For you are the people of hope. You are the people for whom Jesus suffered, died, descended into hell, and was raised to life again.

Christ is Risen!

He is Risen indeed!

Alleluia!

Christ is risen for you! And Christ has made you His own people in the waters of Holy Baptism. For, "baptism now saves you!" In baptism, Jesus Christ did save you! The salvation that Christ has worked for you in and through baptism is like the salvation that came through the ark. Through the Flood, God destroyed the sinful wickedness of Noah's generation, and through baptism, God destroyed your sinfulness and your eternal death. In baptism, Jesus sprinkled you with the blood He shed on the cross, ransoming you from the domain and power of the devil. Because of baptism, you have been reborn. Because of baptism, you are now holy. Because of baptism, you are now God's people. Because of baptism, you are now the people of hope.

This is what your real identity is: you are baptized.

The real identity of the Roman Christians to whom Peter wrote was not that they were exiles, that they were scattered, or even that they suffered. Their real identity was that they were baptized, and because they were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they were people of hope!

The same is true for you. Your real identity, who you really are, is not sinner. Your real identity is not failure. Your real identity is not outsider. Your real identity is not sick. Your real identity is not anxious. Your real identity is not that you live in fear. Your real identity is not that you have to worship from home.

Your real identity, the only identity that really matters, is that you are baptized. And, because you are baptized, you too are built into a people of hope.

As a people of hope, you are called to live that out, just as the Roman Christians of the 1st century were called to do. You are called by God to live as a people of hope in a seemingly hopeless world. You are called to live in an upright way, not sharing in the evils committed in the world, for you live by the power of hope that comes from beyond this world. You are called to live peaceably with others—in your family, in your community, in your state, and in your nation. You are called to live honorably, honoring the government and obeying your civil leaders.

Above all, though, you are called to share your hope with others, to proclaim "the hope that is within you." You might suffer in some ways for doing so. You might be left out of some things by friends and colleagues. You might even have family who think you are foolish for believing in God and His promises in a world like this one.

But suffering is not what defines you. Your baptism is what defines you. Suffering does not last forever, but the hope that comes from Jesus Christ does. For Christ will return for us, for His people of hope, and bring us to live with Him forever.

Peter puts it this way at the end of his letter of hope. Peter ends with a sure promise from God, a promise that is just as much for us in our day as it was in the 1st century.

As Peter said to the scattered Christians of Rome, I say now to you, “after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, and establish you. To Him be the dominion + forever and ever. Amen.”

Christ is Risen!
He is Risen indeed!
Alleluia!
Amen!

Prayer of the Church

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

For the faithful proclamation of Jesus Christ to those who do not know Him, that through hearing the Word of the Lord many may be brought to faith and to the knowledge of the truth, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the Church of God here and everywhere, that all who confess Jesus Christ may be united in doctrine and witness, defended against all the assaults of the enemy, and eager to gather together around Your Word and Sacrament in love for one another, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For this parish, for the work of the Kingdom in our community, and for the resources to accomplish all that God desires, that His name may be glorified among us and His purpose fulfilled in our words and works, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the agencies and institutions through which we love our neighbor and provide for those in need, for the destitute and homeless, and for everyone who suffers unemployment and underemployment, that we may aid them in their needs and assist them to find honorable labor to supply all their needs, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the lonely who suffer the burdens of life without friendship or family, for those depressed or weary of pandemic measures, and for the fellowship of the Church, that we may bear one another's burdens and live in community with Christ as our head, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the sick and those who suffer, [*especially* _____,] that God would grant healing to their bodies, peace for their minds, and consolation in their grief and sorrows, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For love of godly things, that we may delight in God's Word and walk in His ways; and for the Spirit, that we may be led into all truth and kept from error and false doctrine, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the nation, for those who lead our nation, for the end of the pandemic, for peace among nations, and for an end to terror and violence, that we may work for the common good so that justice may prevail, life be protected and truth abound, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

O Lord, our God, as we recall the obedient life and life-giving death of Your Son for our salvation, we pray You to strengthen our faith and to make our hearts bold, that we may not fear but address our prayers to You in all humility. Hear us on behalf of Jesus Christ, our great High

Priest, who even now stands before You on our behalf, pleading our cause with His own blood, until that day when we are delivered from the changes and chances of this mortal life and stand before You in heaven; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: Let us pray the prayer Jesus has taught us to pray: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Benediction: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious unto you. The Lord look on You with His favor and give you peace. Amen.

Final Hymn 643 "Sent Forth By God's Blessing"

1 Sent forth by God's blessing,
 Our true faith confessing,
The people of God from His dwelling take leave.
 The Supper is ended.
 O now be extended
The fruits of this service in all who believe.
 The seed of His teaching,
 Receptive souls reaching,
Shall blossom in action for God and for all.
 His grace did invite us,
 His love shall unite us
To work for God's kingdom and answer His call.

2 With praise and thanksgiving
 To God ever-living,
The tasks of our ev'ryday life we will face.
 Our faith ever sharing,
 In love ever caring,
Embracing His children of each tribe and race.
 With Your feast You feed us,
 With Your light now lead us;
Unite us as one in this life that we share.
 Then may all the living
 With praise and thanksgiving
Give honor to Christ and His name that we bear.
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Closing Address and Announcements

Postlude "Never Will I Leave You"