

**“HOPE LIVES!”**

(John 20:1-8)

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1. **[BOTH Services:]** Read Text (9:30am, MSG OR 11am, NRSV): John 20:1-8 and Pray.
2. **[WATCH FIRST HALF OF VIDEO “Living Hope”** (From SermonSpice, Time: 1:26)]

A–Those are really good questions for today, aren’t they ...especially in light of all that’s happened to us as nation over the last nine months or so:

1–People have lost jobs, homes, retirement income, benefits.

2–Wages are flat, consumer spending is at a record low, and housing and construction markets have taken a nose-dive.

B–And the result has been a sharp increase in people experiencing depression, despair, relationship difficulties, and addictive behaviors (to name a few).

C–For many, the hopes and dreams of a lifetime have been shattered by the events of this economic crisis, leaving some people wondering the same two questions from the video: ...Is it possible to have hope? And if so, what does it look like?

3. Well, it was much the same 2000 years ago for the 3 characters of today’s story in John 20.

A–Like most other people of the day in Palestine, Simon Peter, Mary Magdalene, and another unnamed disciple had spent their lifetimes hoping for and dreaming about a promised Messiah who would free them from the hated Roman rulers of their land – one who would end oppression, bring justice, and help their nation back to health and prosperity.

B–So when Jesus appeared, preaching and teaching about (and demonstrating signs of) the coming kingdom of God, they and others of their generation thought they’d finally found the one about whom the prophets spoke.

1–In fact, at one point Jesus himself even confirmed Peter’s belief that he was the Messiah. <sup>1</sup>

2–And as Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, with throngs of people both following them and lining the road ahead, there was much excitement and anticipation in the air, and Peter, Mary and this other disciple soaked it all in.

C–But within five short days, their hopes and dreams – like those of many today – had been shattered by the events of *that* week, as well.

1–Now, you remember what these events were, I’m sure: ...Thursday evening, Jesus had been arrested on trumped up charges, dragged before hastily convened religious and civil courts in the middle of the night, before finally being sentenced to death by the local Roman procurator.

2–Early Friday morning, Jesus had been tortured by soldiers and finally strung up and nailed to the brutal execution device of the day (the cross), where he hung on a hillside, gasping for breath for 6 hours – and by 3pm, he was dead.

D–So to say that hopes and dreams of these three disciples were “shattered” is perhaps an understatement, because their very *world* had caved in!

1–Like so many stories we hear in today’s crisis, all that they’d been living and working hard for was gone in what seemed like an instant.

2–And like today, the result was a deep despair, a frustration, and a fear about both the outcome of their present, and the lost possibilities for their future.

4. And yet, the message of that first Easter is that Jesus’ death *wasn’t* the end of the story.

A–Oh, Mary comes first to the tomb *thinking* that it was! She was there to anoint and prepare the dead body for a proper burial, since they didn’t have time on Friday to do it before the Jewish Sabbath began at sundown.

1–She sees the heavy stone (meant to seal the tomb entrance) rolled away, & assumes – to add insult to injury – that robbers have been there and stolen Jesus’ body.

2–So she runs back and tells the other disciples. Peter and another take off to the tomb, and both discover it empty just as Mary feared.

3–Yet, totally inconsistent with a robbery, they find Jesus’ linen head wrappings strangely rolled up in a neat pile, and it perplexes them – ...

4–...So much so that the scripture says that the unnamed disciple in this story (MSG) “*took one look at the evidence and believed*” (NRSV) “*saw and believed*” that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

B–Now, in the book of John it’s actually not until the *next* part of the story (Verses 11-18, that I didn’t read today) that the resurrected Jesus actually *appears* (in this case, to Mary).

1–But the point that the whole story is making is that, far from being the *end* of the story, Jesus’ death was merely the end of a *chapter*.

2–These disciples turn the page, and they find a Jesus who’s been raised from the dead, and that the hopes and dreams they had for their present and future were not only still alive, but from this point on could *never* be extinguished again!

C—On that first Easter, in other words, they stumble upon the truth that in the form of the resurrected Jesus, HOPE LIVES! – and that he is, in fact, the very personification of HOPE itself!

D—...So that just as at Christmas we say that Jesus is “*GOD incarnate / with us / in the flesh*”, so at Easter we say that Jesus is “*HOPE incarnate / with us / in the flesh.*”

5. So what, then, does all this mean for us today?

A—Well, let’s think back to those questions in the opening video, asking if it’s possible for *us* to have hope in the midst of the problems and challenges of life? And if so, then what does that hope look like?

B—Well, if for Mary, Peter, and the other disciple the answer is that “*Yes, there IS hope! And it looks like the person of Jesus!*”, then THAT is the answer for US here today, as well.

1—It means, for example, that – like those first disciples – the recent catastrophes that have altered so many of our lives need *not* be the end of *our* story, either.

2—The loss of our job, or our home, or our marriage, or even our health, or our loved ones, need *not* be the end of our story.

3—The grim news of tragedy, injustice, prejudice, and betrayal that we so often see in the news (and sometimes experience firsthand) need *not* be the end of our story.

C—No. Turn the page, and we – like the persons in today’s scripture – can discover that the hope of that *first* Easter can be *our* hope, as well – that we *can*, in fact, have (in the words of the old hymn) “*strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow; blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.*” <sup>2</sup>

D—And we can have all of this because HOPE LIVES in the form of the resurrected Christ.

6. You see, Easter is all about God’s hope to us in the midst of what seems to be terrible things, and the effects that that hope can have upon our lives.

A—For example, Easter hope frees us *FROM* life’s *past* mistakes – those things we wish we could do over again.

B—It equips us *FOR* life’s *present* problems/dilemmas – whether they come in the form of unemployment, bad health, broken relationships, or even lost retirement funds.

C—But Easter hope also points us *TOWARDS* a brighter *future* – a future not necessarily free from pain, hurt, or challenge, but from one of uncertainty, despair, doubt, and fear – a future anchored in the assurance that “[*nothing*] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” <sup>3</sup> – not even a bad economy!

D–Think back again to the specific life challenges we saw in today’s opening video. And now watch what happens when we apply the effects of Easter resurrection HOPE to those same challenges...

**[WATCH SECOND HALF OF VIDEO “Living Hope”** (From SermonSpice, Time: 1:02) ; Second half edited for ending slide to conclude with words “*Hope Lives... for you*”)]

7. Friends, whatever challenges you’re facing today – whether they be financial, relational, behavioral, or health-related – the message of Easter is that HOPE LIVES for you and me.
8. And all we have to do to receive it is to reach out and claim it by claiming the one who personifies it... Jesus Christ, our resurrected Savior.
9. *[PRAY for people to receive the hope of Easter, and include an invitation for people to accept Jesus into their lives as hope incarnate...]*
10. [CLOSING SONG: UMH: #310, “He Lives” or PRAISE SONG]

**ENDNOTES:**

1. Read Mark 8:29-30.
2. Verse 3 from the United Methodist Hymnal, hymn #140, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.”
3. Read Romans 8:38-39.