



April 19, 2020 • The Second Sunday of Easter

1 Peter 1:3-9

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I was laughing to myself yesterday morning around 10 o'clock when my boys—without even asking if they could go outside into the yard—just *burst* outside! They clearly had noticed that the sun was shining and it was no longer snowing, as it had been for the previous three days, so they just *burst* out there and picked up their bikes, which had been lying dormant on the grass for the prior three days, and started biking and running around the front yard.

As they did, I thought to myself, “Ah, there they go, ‘bursting their three-day prison.’” Those words might sound familiar to you (and you know me, so you know that hymns and parts of hymns tend to fly around in my brain all the time!) and it is in fact a phrase from the hymn from “This Joyful Eastertide”. The refrain of that hymn includes these words: “Had Christ, that once was slain n’er burst his three-day prison, our faith had been in vain; but now is Christ arisen, arisen, arisen, arisen.”

And then I thought, “*Would* that confinement were only three days!” And here we are in day thirty-something of staying at home, in order to protect one another, for which I am 100,000% in. *And* it’s hard, isn’t it; it’s really hard in so many ways. I think time and time again throughout this season of confinement that whatever was already hard is a lot harder now.

I was also thinking about our epistle from First Peter today, for this (as basically with all the epistles in the New Testament) is written from an author who is physically distanced from the community to which he is writing, a community with whom he has lived and breathed and longs to return. For example, the apostle Paul wrote in Philippians, “*My heart swells with joy whenever I think of you. I remember you always in my prayers. I am yearning and longing and hungering to get back to you*” (1 Philippians 1:3-5, paraphrased). That is the context for each of our epistles.

It strikes me in this portion from First Peter that the author is underscoring, of all things, **the need to rejoice** and the thought that the current confinement, the current suffering, would actually yield **more** praise and glory and worship of God, than less.

And, my heart feels heavy. My heart is tired. Staying at home is simple in a lot of ways and really difficult in many, many other ways. I wonder if your heart is heavy as well. How do we follow these words from First Peter to lift up and rejoice “with an indescribable and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8)? What does indescribable and glorious joy look like right now? What does rejoicing look like right now? What does it look like to lift up our hearts and to help lift one another’s hearts?

I recalled then a poem¹ by George Herbert, who was an Anglican priest writing England some time ago, that pursues this very question of how exactly we might lift up our hearts, how we might rise and rise up throughout our season of Easter. He writes this:

*Rise heart; thy Lord is risen. Sing his praise
Without delays,
Who takes thee by the hand, that though likewise
With him mayst rise:
That, as his death calcined thee to dust,
His life may make thee gold, and much more, just.*

That Jesus' life would make ours not only dust...but also gold! I hear in this poem an echo of First Peter, that the "genuineness of our faith" is what is gold—"more precious", actually, "than gold, that, though perishable, is tested by fire" (1 Peter 1:7). And our faith is being tested right now.

I don't believe in a God who gives us tests just for the sake of it. What I'm talking about is that it is a **struggle**. Life, day in and day out, is just hard right now, and we are in that sense struggling and being tested as though by fire. And, our faith is what is more precious than gold.

What should we do? Herbert continues:

*[Then] Awake, my lute, and struggle for thy part
With all thy art.
The crosse taught all wood to resound his name,
Who bore the same.
His stretched sinews taught all strings, what key
Is best to celebrate this most high day.*

*Consort both heart and lute, and twist a song
Pleasant and long:
Or, since all musick is but three parts vied
And multiplied,
O let thy blessed Spirit bear a part,
And make up our defects with his sweet art.*

Life is hard right now. And all of the defects of all of our personal lives, our family lives, our community, our city's lives and certainly our nation's lives are risen to the surface. It is very easy, then, for our own hearts to be heavy. But we are to find ways to lift up our hearts and to find whatever we can: Maybe it's a lute, maybe it's an organ, maybe it's a piano; maybe it's writing a letter, maybe it's picking up the phone; maybe it's baking something. Maybe it's simply getting from morning through night.

¹ "Easter" from *The Temple*, 1633, <https://www.ccel.org/h/herbert/temple/Easter.html>

Do whatever we can and find joy in that—for our joy is based not in what we can see, but in what is unseen, and **that** is our “living hope through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:3).

Peace be with you.