

Born Again to a Living Hope
Pastor Morgan Murray
West Valley Presbyterian Church

1 Peter 1:3-12

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, 7 so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, 11 inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. 12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look!

Once there was a boy who lived a very miserable life, living in a tiny storage closet under the stairs in the home of his Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon, along with their son Dudley. The Dursley's deeply resented having to care for the boy, whose parents had died when he was just a toddler and had left him alone in the world – without a home, without an inheritance, without a future. This boy was an unloved nobody who was completely unremarkable in every way.

Except he wasn't. He wasn't unremarkable. He wasn't a nobody. And he most certainly wasn't without any means or any future. When Hagrid the Giant bursts into his life on his eleventh birthday, Harry Potter learns that he is a wizard, that a place has been reserved for him at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry since the day he was born, and that there is a vault full of gold waiting for him at Gringotts Wizarding Bank. He will, in short order, find out that he is far from being a nobody. He is in fact the most famous person in the wizarding world. He is The Boy Who Lived.

It's a pretty great story. Clearly it's a story that captures our collective imagination since it has made author J. K. Rowling wealthier than the Queen Elizabeth II.

When Harry arrives at Hogwarts, life doesn't get easier for him. It actually gets much harder. Harry may not have enjoyed living under the stairs, but he was safe there. From now on, Harry will face difficult trials and greater dangers. But from the moment Hagrid shows up on his

magical motorcycle, Harry begins a journey of discovery – learning where he has come from, who (and whose) he is, and the destiny that awaits him.

With the opening lines of his letter, Peter wants his readers to understand that: They are not unloved. They are not unremarkable. They have not been forgotten, abandoned, or left orphaned.

Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they are part of God family. Their story is part of God's story. They are people with an incredible backstory and an even greater destiny. The fact that putting their trust in Jesus has made their lives harder and placed them in greater danger is, in fact, confirmation that they are who Peter says they are.

(Core)

As part of the family of God, our story is a part of God's story and that story has a certain outcome.

In a similar way to how Hagrid tells Harry about a whole new life waiting for him, Pastor Peter tells all believers that they have been born again into a new life.

It's nearly impossible to miss Peter's allusion to the events John describes in chapter three of his gospel. That's the part where Jesus has a clandestine meeting with the esteemed Pharisee Nicodemus. Nicodemus recognizes that Jesus has come from God. Nicodemus knows Jesus could not do the miracles he has been doing apart from God's power. Jesus says: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (Jn 3:3). This was a difficult concept for Nicodemus, and no doubt it was a difficult concept for Jesus' disciples as well. But clearly is at the core of the Jesus' teaching so Peter opens his letter with it.

To be born again is not to start life over from the beginning. It's not a long tedious do-over. It's not about trying to have a spotless, mess free life, as if God ever expected us to be able to do that or required it of us. Being born again means life of a completely different order and an entirely new quality.

Being born again isn't about cleaning up, it's about waking up. It's about waking up to our identity as part of God's family. It's about waking up to our destiny, and then living that out in the world for the sake of others.

Peter points out three features of this new life.

We are born, Peter says,

... Into a living hope,

... Into a secure inheritance, and

... Into a certain future, which Peter refers to as "salvation."

Into living hope

Hope: A confident expectation based on the work of God. Hope is centered on Jesus, and since Jesus is alive this hope can be called a living hope.

Into an inheritance

Inheritance: That which is given to family members, eternal and not subject to loss.

Into salvation

Salvation: Being – and becoming – that which God always intended us to be. Salvation begins now, is being worked out now, and will reach its climax at the end of time, marked by the return of Jesus Christ.

Ironically, it was the faith of Peter's first readers that invited persecution but also provided divine protection through their suffering. To be born again into this living hope also means being placed in the crucible of real life.

Just as being The-Boy-Who-Lived made Harry's life both highly dangerous and highly consequential, so it is with you and me, The-People-of-Living-Hope.

Being part of God's family is dangerous.

Peter says this is a cause for rejoicing. For a short time we will face trials. In them, our faith is tested, purified, and refined. When we see Jesus face to face, we won't have to wonder if our faith is genuine or of true worth. The crucible of this life will have burned away everything that is not of God in us.

Being part of God's family is consequential.

We are part of something larger and more important than we can grasp. It is a mystery, a glorious mystery.

It is a mystery, and yet because we have met Jesus, we have a far greater sense of it than the prophets even had! All their toil and anticipation was our benefit!

It is a mystery, and yet because Christ came into the material world as one of us, the angels that dwell in the spiritual realm and surround the throne of God wish they could experience this mystery as we have!

Because we have been born anew into a living hope, who we are and what we do matters. It is the stuff of eternal consequence. Keep that in mind as you speak into other people's lives, put your hands to the work God has given you to do, and move out into the big, beautiful, dangerous world God sent his Son to save.

So... how does it feel to be compared to Harry Potter? A little silly? Throughout the books, Harry continues to wonder aloud, "Why? Why me? Why am I so special?" Since this is Mother's Day it's worth mentioning that the answer to Harry's why was his mother's love. Her love protected him from the killing curse, though it could not spare him the most difficult of trials.

So it is with us. We too may ask ourselves "Why?" But it far better that we accept that it IS us, that WE are the ones who been chosen in love, and that this is simply the way things are. Each of us has a hero's journey to take, and all of us have a destiny to fulfill together. Let's take that truth in, and then get on with fulfilling it.

Amen.