



**"The Best is Yet to Come...Really"**

**Rev. Dr. Scott Field**

**1 Peter 1:3-12**

**November 4, 2018**

**9:15 AM Service**

Today is the celebration of All Saints' Day, when we recognize the lives and especially the deaths of members of our congregation, when all of us reconnect with the value of particular people in our lives - which means among us the fog of grief comes close; our hearts again long for those we love but see no more. We may recall the hard time of dying or the unexpected, tragic, life-changing news of a death that came far too soon. We are gathered here this morning not denying but engaging the broken road of aging, disability, dying, and death. For many of us it is an unwelcome reminder of painful loss. But I have wonderful news to share from the word of the Lord for the oppressed and heart-broken:

*<sup>3</sup> All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, <sup>4</sup> and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. <sup>5</sup> And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.*

*<sup>6</sup> So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. <sup>7</sup> These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So, when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.*

*<sup>8</sup> You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. <sup>9</sup> The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls.*

*<sup>10</sup> This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. <sup>11</sup> They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward.*

*<sup>12</sup> They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen.*

## **A Word to the World-Weary**

Have you ever questioned God's wisdom? Wondered about God's ways? Wished God would fix the grief, the injustice, and poverty, and broken world right now? Today? Amazon Prime delivery of redemption?

The original setting for the first letter of Peter was to Christ-followers in Asia Minor, generally the region of the globe we call modern Turkey. Though the persecution of Christians was most potently focused in Rome itself, the general disregard for Christ-followers was widespread throughout the Empire -- including Assia Minor. Many Christ-followers then and through all the years since have wondered why we experience such sorrow, witness such evil in our world, and many want the full redemption Jesus promised to come here and now.

In his book *The Jesus Creed*, Scot McKnight shares the moving story of Margaret Ault. When Margaret was just about to complete her Ph.D. at Duke, something unexpected—but quite welcomed—happened: she fell in love. She went on a date with a man named Hyung Goo Kim, and the proverbial sparks flew. But almost as quickly as the sparks became a fire, they were doused with water. Hyung Goo informed Margaret that he was HIV positive. Needless to say, Margaret was devastated. In her own words, "I'd just met someone I liked, and we were definitely not going to live happily ever after. I felt like I had been kicked in the gut by the biggest boot in the world."

Still, she and Hyung Goo were married. In his book, McKnight asks the question many of us would ask: "Why would anyone invite into the core of their being so much pain?" He then goes on to share that the answer unfolds in the rest of Margaret and Hyung Goo's story.

He writes:

When Margaret was in graduate school at Duke, she and Hyung Goo loved to walk in the Duke gardens, and so knowledgeable did they become of its plants that they "supervised construction" of a new project. They walked through each part of the garden routinely and had names for some of the ducks. In their last spring together, the garden seemed especially beautiful [to them].

Hyung Goo died in the fall and Margaret returned to the gardens in the spring where a memorial garden of roses was being constructed in his honor.

McKnight then points the reader to a series of quotations from Margaret's book *Sing Me to Heaven*, where she reflects on the days she returned to the gardens.

She writes:

Where peonies were promised, there were only the dead stumps of last year's stalks; where day lilies were promised, there were unprepossessing tufts of foliage; where Hosta's were promised, there was nothing at all. And yet I know what lushness lay below the surface; those beds that were so brown and empty and, to the unknowing eye, so unpromising, would be full to bursting in a matter of months.

Is the whole world like this? Is this what it might be like to live in expectation, real expectation, of the resurrection?

Was not Hyung Goo's and my life together like this? Empty and sere, and yet a seedbed of fullness and life for both of us. He died, and I was widowed; yet in his dying, we both were made alive.

After quoting Margaret's words, McKnight concludes:

Where does she find strength to grip such faith and such hope? It is found in [her question]: Is the whole world like this?

The answer, "Yes, the whole world is like this: the whole world offers us tokens of new life beyond death and disasters." It offers the promise of new life beyond the grave, a life of renewed love in the presence of God. Why? Because Jesus was raised from the dead. (Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed* (Paraclete Press, 2005), pp. 286-288)

Oddly, we find the consistent theme of 1 Peter is JOY! Did you note the language?

*All praise to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (v. 3)

*Be truly glad -- for there is wonderful joy ahead even though for a little while we may experience all kinds of suffering.* (v.6)

*All of this is so wonderful that even the Angels in heaven are eagerly watching to see what happens!* (v. 12)

In a single sentence, [theologian] Jurgen Moltmann expresses the great span from Good Friday to Easter: "God weeps with us so that we may someday laugh with him." (Philip Yancey, *Christianity Today* magazine (September 2005), p. 120)

Sheldon Vanauken was a student of the English professor and Christian apologist C. S. Lewis in the early 1950s. He recounts in his book A Severe Mercy the story of his last meeting with his mentor when Vanauken was leaving Oxford for the United States. Over one final lunch together at a pub, they had spent time wondering aloud about the nature of life after death. When they had finished eating, they stood outside of the pub, talked for a few more minutes, and just before parting ways, Lewis said to Vanauken, "I shan't say goodbye. We'll meet again." The great apologist then plunged into the traffic to cross the street while Vanauken watched his friend walk away. When Lewis got to the other side of the street, he turned around, anticipating that his friend would still be standing there. With a grin on his face, Lewis shouted over the great roar of cars, "Besides—Christians never say goodbye." (Greg Ogden, in the sermon "Christians Never Say Good-Bye," Christ Church of Oak Brook (Oak Brook, IL/preached 5-24-09)

### **What does this have to do with us today?**

The Apostle Paul captures our living hope in the midst of a dying world:

*That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. <sup>17</sup> For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! <sup>18</sup> So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.* 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

NLT

