

**Easter
Living Hope**

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Happy Easter everyone! We are so happy to have you with us at The Creek as we celebrate the most important event in the history of the world—the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins, and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, bringing life, hope, and promise for everyone who would believe in him.

I want to ask you to think about a time that you experienced an unexpected blessing that changed your life. This happened about four years ago for us in the Hamel family. We had two kids, and because Keren's pregnancies were so difficult, we decided that would be it for us. But when our second child was only about six months old, we were driving around town, running errands and Keren said, "Would you mind pulling into Kroger and getting a pregnancy test?" I was like, "Oh! Sure..." So I ran in and made a quick purchase. On the way home from Kroger, Keren threw up in the car. I knew what that meant, so I turned the car around and returned the pregnancy test. We were going to need those eight dollars for diapers! We received an unexpected blessing that entirely changed our lives.

Some of you may have recently heard the story of Richard Pulley, a 78-year-old retired man, who, because of unexpected medical expenses, came out of retirement and started delivering for DoorDash. One woman caught this video of him on her door camera and heard his story. She shared it online, and over the next two weeks, over 32,000 people contributed a grand total of \$970,000, which was then given to him as a gift. He received an unexpected blessing that absolutely changed his life.

Easter is the ultimate unexpected blessing that changes not only the history of the world, but changes the lives of individual people, as well. As you saw in the videos during worship, four days before Easter morning, Jesus was with his disciples, and he told them about the events that were about to happen: his arrest, his trial, his torture, his crucifixion. Then he looked at the Twelve, his loyal followers, men who had been with him every day for over three years, and said, "Every one of you will run away and abandon me when it all goes down." One of his disciples, a man named Peter, said, "Not me! I will never deny you. I'm with you until the end." Jesus said, "Oh Peter, you have so much confidence, so much zeal, but you are going to deny me not once, but three times before the rise of the sun tomorrow morning when the rooster crows."

Then, as Jesus predicted, he was arrested. When the army of 600 soldiers took Jesus captive, all his disciples fled. Then, as Jesus was standing trial, Peter was standing at a distance, keeping warm next to a fire. Someone asked him, "Hey, don't you know that man? Aren't you one of his followers?" Peter denied it not once, not twice, but three times. "I don't know him!" The Gospel of Luke tells us what happened. "As Peter was speaking, the rooster

crowded. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter” (Luke 22:60-62). In Greek, the phrase translated “looked straight at Peter” means “to lock eyes.” It’s a piercing look. It’s like Jesus was looking into Peter’s soul. Luke 22:62 tells us, “Peter went outside and wept bitterly.” The phrase “wept bitterly” is not a picture of a silent tear or two; it means to wail, to sob, to heave uncontrollably in anguish. This is the lowest point of Peter’s life. Have you ever had a moment like that? Where you didn’t just mess up—you became the kind of person you never thought you’d be?

All alone, Jesus is found guilty and condemned to death. He is beaten, marched to Golgotha, and nailed to the cross. He dies in roughly six hours, but to be sure he was dead, the soldiers took a spear and ran it into his side, piercing his heart. They lowered Jesus off the tree, placed his body in the tomb, and rolled the stone away. The stone being rolled away is more than just physical; it’s symbolic. The stone being rolled over the tomb is like the door being shut and the lights being turned off in the hope that Jesus really was the Son of God who came to save the world. No savior ends up in the tomb.

Three days later, on Sunday morning, some of Jesus' followers went to the tomb to pay their respect, and to lay spices on Jesus' body. Even as they were making their way to the tomb, they said, “Who is going to roll the stone away?” Like at your house, sometimes these ladies would hand the pickle jar to their husbands to open them up. They had no idea how they were going to move this several-hundred-pound stone. “But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said” (Luke 24:4-6). Don’t be alarmed? Are you kidding me? Can you imagine what it would be like visiting the grave of a family member or close friend, and as you walk up, you see the grave has been dug up, the casket is open, and an angel is standing there saying: “Don't be alarmed; this is business as usual.”

The angel says, ““You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him”” (Matthew 28:6). This is the first recorded announcement of the Easter message. Jesus’ body is not here. Jesus is not dead any longer. He has risen. He’s alive. He hasn’t just come back from the dead; he has conquered death, and now the world needs to know what’s happened! So the angel says, “Go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’” Did you notice what the angel said? “Don’t just go tell the disciples; tell Peter. Peter—the one who failed. Peter—the one who ran. Peter—the one who swore he didn’t even know me. Go tell him! Make sure he knows the story isn’t over.”

We know that over the course of the next forty days, Jesus appeared at least ten different times and appeared to hundreds of people. They were convinced that he was alive. His own brother, a man named James, who thought Jesus had lost his mind when he told everyone

one was the Messiah, changed his own mind and converted, becoming a Christian because he saw Jesus risen from the dead.

But one of the most powerful post-resurrection encounters was Jesus' encounter with Peter. Peter was fishing on a boat, which was his profession before he followed Jesus. He and his partners hadn't caught anything. They a person standing on the shore. That person told them to throw their nets on the other side of the boat. They tried. Their nets were so full they didn't have the strength to pull them in. Someone said, "That's Jesus" "As soon as Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment around him and jumped into the water" (John 21:7). He couldn't wait to be in Jesus' presence; he had to swim to Jesus.

Peter gets to the shore, clothes dripping wet, and approaches Jesus, who is sitting next to a fire. Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" (John 21:15). He asked him that not once, not twice, but three times. At first, Peter seemed hurt that Jesus asked him so many times. "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you" (John 21:17). But Jesus didn't ask the question three times for his own sake; he asked three times for Peter's sake. Peter rejected Jesus three times, in the greatest failure of his life. Then Jesus went to the cross to pay the price for that failure. And now, Jesus gives Peter three opportunities to re-express his love. Peter received an unexpected blessing that entirely changed his life! He was not only restored in his relationship with Jesus, but he also he became the leader of the early church. He went from the greatest falling of his life, to the greatest calling of his life.

Because Jesus is alive today, he is still meeting people and restoring people and calling people. When Jesus shows up in our lives, just like with Peter, he's not shouting condemnation, not shouting shame, but simply asking us, "Do you love me? Do you love me?" And if we say, "Yes, Jesus—I love you. You are the one who gave me life. You are the one who died and rose again to give me eternal life. Jesus, I love you," then just as Jesus transformed Peter's life, he will transform your life, too!

I've witnessed that transformation in people's lives again and again, including in one of my dear friends, Devon Ferguson. I'd like to invite him to the stage to share how Jesus met him in a place of desperate need and offered him hope that transformed his life.

[View the online sermon to hear Devo's story.]

It's incredible how Jesus can change someone's life and give them a living hope! Jesus transformed my friend Devon, Jesus transformed Peter. Because Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and rose victoriously from the grave, he can transform anyone's life who trusts in him. When Peter was an old man, just years before he himself would be killed—crucified upside down—for his faith in Jesus, he wrote these words: "In God's great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"

1 Peter 1:3. Because Jesus rose from the dead, anyone who places their faith in him and follows him is given a living hope. No matter where you may be today, because Jesus rose from the dead, he promises hope for tomorrow.

A few decades ago, archeologists were digging in the ancient Judean town of Masada. This is the desert fortress built into the cliffs by Herod the Great to be an impenetrable stronghold. When the Romans fought against the Jews in 70 AD, there were 1,000 Jewish soldiers that used this as their hideout. The Romans had no way to scale the cliffs, so they used over 10,000 Roman soldiers and thousands of prisoners of war, and they moved the equivalent of 20,000 dump truck loads of dirt and stone, to build a siege ramp that was 700 feet long and 330 feet high, so the Roman army could walk up it. The night before they did, all the Jewish soldiers took their own lives, to not allow the enemy to be the ones who defeated them. Masada is a place where there was no life for nearly 2,000 years. But when the archaeologists were digging there in the 1960s, they found date palm seeds, which were carbon dated to being at least 2,000 years old. They were dried, shriveled up, and seemingly lifeless. But someone decided to put them in fresh soil and add water. What looked dead and lifeless sprouted and grew into a thriving tree.

Those seeds sat buried in the dust for 2,000 years; everyone thought they were dead, but in the right hands, they sprouted to life. Some of you came here today, feeling like Peter, feeling like you've failed, feeling like the story is over, feeling lifeless. Because Jesus loved you so much that he died for you, and because he rose from the grave, there is a living hope available to you!

Just days after Jesus restored Peter, Peter had the chance to stand in front of thousands of people and tell them about Jesus—he preached the very first Easter message and told them the hope that was available to them. “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter, ‘What shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37). How do we respond? How can we enter into the living hope of Jesus? Peter gave one of the clearest and simplest answers ever: “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38).