

“Great Reason to Praise God”

1 Peter 1:3-9

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Much praise is given to mankind for their various accomplishments in this life. The not quite so recent story of Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger is one great example of such praise. He is known for his heroic emergency landing of US Airways Flight 1549 in 2009, where, shortly after takeoff from New York's LaGuardia Airport, the plane struck a flock of geese, causing both engines to fail. Captain Sullenberger, along with his co-pilot, expertly glided the plane onto the Hudson River, ensuring the survival of all 155 passengers and crew onboard. His quick decision-making and piloting skills during this incident, often referred to as the "Miracle on the Hudson," earned him national acclaim and highlighted the importance of experience and composure in crisis situations. The praise for his actions was so great that it even earned him a movie re-enactment courtesy of Tom Hanks.

This story, and others like it, should make you stop and think about the praise that you give to others. It certainly is fine and right that you should give credit where credit is due, but above all you should not forget that you have all the more reason to give praise to God. He has done wonderful and remarkable things for you, more than any human could ever accomplish on your behalf, even more than saving your life from a plane crash. The Apostle Peter in our text this morning points out one great reason why Christians have great reason to praise God. And that reason is that, “According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet 1:3).”

As Christians, you truly have great reason to praise God. The portion of Holy Scripture just read shows that He has given you new birth in Christ. By nature, you were conceived and born in sin. You were dead in your trespasses and sins, children of wrath, and children of the world with your interests fixed on all manner of material things. You had no Spiritual sight at all within you. The Scripture tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” This very aptly describes your former condition to which you have died and from which you have been born again.

Because now all of that has changed. God, according to His great mercy, has caused you to be born again. No longer are you dead in your trespasses and sins. No

longer are you children of wrath, but now you are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. You have “put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24).” You now walk as the children of God, being led by His Spirit which now dwells within you. Your thoughts and love that were previously directed inward to the self are now directed to God—to your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Lord has brought you from “rags to riches” and there can be no greater reason to praise God in this life! He has caused you to be born again, and so sin no longer condemns you or keeps you captive and separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

And all of this is according to the abundant mercy of God. His mercy is no mystery, because it has been revealed in the truth of His Holy Word. He says through Paul, in Galatians 4:4-5, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” The Lord saw that the human race was floundering in sin—that you were floundering in sin—not being able to escape from the condemnation into which you had been born. And He, of His great mercy, sent forth His Son to be the salvation of mankind, to be the Savior of the world, and to buy man back from sin and death and bring you back into the heavenly fold.

This was not done with great pomp and circumstance. The Savior of the world was born to an impoverished woman in a lowly stable in the city of Bethlehem. He spent His days on earth in poverty and privation among men. But despite that, He faithfully fulfilled the Law of God in perfect obedience to His Father in heaven, and He did so on your behalf. He was mocked, scourged, spit upon, and hanged upon the cursed tree of the Cross, not for Himself, but for you. He willingly suffered all of it that He might give you perfect redemption—a complete and fulfilled redemption in His blood. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us (Eph. 1:7-8a).”

This mercy is not any kind of limited mercy. It is great mercy, abundant and overflowing in the love of God which is yours in Christ Jesus. All and every sin you have ever committed is forgiven by your heavenly Father. There is no sin, no matter how seemingly terrible and “unforgiveable” it may be, that His mercy will not cover, save for the raging against and rejection of the Holy Spirit. Christ has been raised, and has been seated at the right hand of God for this very purpose, to “give repentance...and forgiveness of sins,” as it says in our first reading from Acts 5. Yes, your new birth is due to the abundant and great mercy of God, who “so loved the world, that He gave His

only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (Jn. 3:16).”

The Apostle Peter assures you of this truth, in that he says this rebirth in the Spirit is by the resurrection of your Lord, Jesus Christ. This glorious dying and rising in the water of Baptism, this being claimed as children of the Most-High God, is yours according to the sacrifice of Jesus as the propitiation for your sins. It is sealed for you by His triumphant return to life. The very fact that Jesus did rise from the grave and did prove Himself the victor over sin, death, and the devil guarantees you your sonship with God. By His resurrection, Jesus proved Himself to be the very Son of God, who has the power to keep His promises. And in the proper fear of God, you trust that He will indeed keep those promises. His victory over sin and death by overcoming the tomb has opened up eternal life to you as one who believes in Him. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:17, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” But Christ is risen, and your faith is realized and fulfilled in His victory.

Christ has risen as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:20). As in the Old Testament, the first fruits of the harvest were the forepledge of the later and greater harvest, so the resurrection of Christ is the forepledge of the fulfillment of your life to come in the later and greater harvest. What great reason to praise God! For you have been born again to a living hope, one that has been secured by Jesus, and kept alive in you by faith. That living hope is yours by the new birth of water and the Spirit that has brought you into the Kingdom of God. Unbelievers are without God in the world and without hope. But the new man, the one that has risen out of the waters of your Baptism, has a life blessed with great hope. The old man has been drowned in those waters along with the sin and despair he would have you hold onto if not for the abundance of God’s mercy.

The best for that new man is yet to come—the best for you is yet to come. The entire life of the Christian is a life of hope, one which looks to the future gifts which have been promised to you in faith. To the reconciled sinner, the gates of heaven are standing wide open, and the hope of that which is to come is a living hope that cannot die. Many earthly desires and hopes are never realized and come and go as flights of fancy during your earthly time. But you have a hope that has been realized in the now of Christ’s resurrection, and looks forward to the promise of the words of your risen Savior. Jesus says in John 14:2, “In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” By His blood that promise is yours, and while you await the fullness of His grace when that promise is fulfilled, you receive His grace in the forgiveness of sins He brings you in Word and Sacraments.

Just as He says to the Apostles in our Gospel lesson, He comes here with words of comfort and reconciliation when He says, “Peace be with you.” These are words of absolution—an absolute assurance for them and for you that your sins are forgiven for His sake, despite the unbelieving and doubting old Adam that dwells in them and in you. An “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” inheritance awaits you in heaven. That is the content of your living hope in this life. It cannot possibly perish or decay. It cannot ever lose its value and its beauty. What you have in this world will eventually pass away and fade out of existence, but your inheritance with God in the home of your eternal Father is secured for you by the resurrected Jesus.

Friendship and earthly love will pass away, but that inheritance that is yours never fades. It stands strong in its everlasting glory and will exist for you in unending joy in the presence of your loving God. God’s promise is sure and reliable, unshakeable, and imparted to you by faith. You have great reason to praise God, and it is because He has given you the rebirth of water and the Spirit, which has given you the living hope that by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, you too will rise anew at the end of all things. Without God’s mercy, you would be nomads, wandering through the fields of this world in vice and sin, trotting on toward eternal death and condemnation. But thanks be to God for His merciful goodness, who has given you new birth and the hope of eternal joy in Christ. That living hope which He has given you by the raising of His beloved Son sustains you in this life until the day of its consummation, when you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, living no longer in hope, but in the light of His eternal glory. Amen.