

Easter Sunday: March 31<sup>st</sup> 2013 : "Hope Springs Eternal"

Nearly 20 years ago at the height of Operation Desert Storm, Ruth Dillow received a very sad message from the Pentagon. The message stated that her son, Clayton had stepped on a landmine in Kuwait and was killed. Ruth later wrote these words, "I can't begin to describe my grief and shock. It was almost more than I could bear. For 3 days I just wept. I expressed anger and loss. For 3 days people tried to comfort me but nothing worked ... the loss was simply too great.

But 3 days after she received that message the phone rang. The voice on the other end said , "Mom, it's me." It's Clayton. I'm alive. Ruth said, I couldn't believe it at first. But then I recognized his voice and realized he really was alive. The message was all a mistake. She said, "I laughed, I cried, I felt like turning cartwheels because my son who I thought was dead was actually alive."

Hearing a story like that allows us to imagine the absolute grief followed by the absolute joy, those disciples of Jesus experienced on that first Easter Sunday.

They had watched the sun climb the sky with their hope in tatters. Nothing good could come from a dead leader; a dead friend; a dead Messiah. But then that very evening as they met in fear behind locked doors, confused by the stories the women were telling, Jesus walked into their midst. The signs of His crucifixion were obvious in the wounds He still bore, but He was alive. They ate with Him. They talked with Him. They touched Him.

And Hope was not just reborn, it sprung eternal. For surely nothing was now impossible with such a Leader. Every promise He had ever made to them was now absolutely fulfillable.

Over the next 40 days Jesus was often with them, teaching them about His resurrection and all that it meant, and building up within them a hope that they would soon be prepared to die for. And after 40 days He departed from them into heaven, and I'm sure He left them raring to go out and share with others about a Hope that was eternal.

But before He left them, He commanded them to do no such thing, but to wait in Jerusalem for the gift that his Father had promised. The power of the

Holy Spirit that would so fill them that in His power they would become effective witnesses to the Hope that is in Christ, not just in Jerusalem but in all Judea, Samaria and to every nation in the world.

And so it happened that on the day of Pentecost Peter preached about the Hope that the death and resurrection of Jesus has released into this world, and over 3,000 believed and proclaimed that belief through the act of baptism.

Then a little while later through that same power, Hope was given in place of hopelessness when a man was miraculously healed, and the preaching about Hope through belief in Jesus continued, and the number of men saved increased to 5,000.

And this should not surprise us because the Bible says that this Hope they preached and we proclaim still, does not disappoint. Through Faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, Romans 5 states, we rejoice in the Hope of glory. But also, we can even rejoice in any sufferings that life pours upon us because we have the assurance of our risen Lord constantly at our side.

Now you may be thinking, but Pastor with the extent of my suffering, my darkness, my hopelessness, how will this hope ever break through. How can you be sure it won't disappoint me.

Because God's Word says in Romans 5:5 "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts, by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

You mean so much to God that He delights to give you His Spirit when you reach out to Him through the sacrifice of the Son, and by that Spirit He pours His love for us into our hearts till they overflow. And from that time on, even when you go through situations so dark that you contemplate giving up your Hope, that hope God has placed in you will cause you to cling, sometimes by your spiritual fingertips, to the God who ever lives for you.

James DeLoach, a Baptist Pastor from Texas, wrote:

I am not a connoisseur of great art, but from time to time a painting or picture will really speak a clear, strong message to me. Some time ago I saw a picture of an old burned-out mountain shack. All that remained was the chimney...the charred debris of what had been that family's sole possession.

In front of this destroyed home stood an old grandfather-looking man dressed only in his underclothes with a small boy clutching a pair of patched overalls. It was evident that the child was crying. Beneath the picture were the words which the artist felt the old man was speaking to the boy. They were simple words, yet they presented a profound theology and philosophy of life. Those words were, "Hush child, God ain't dead!"

That vivid picture of that burned-out mountain shack, that old man, the weeping child, and those words "God ain't dead" keep returning to my mind. Instead of it being a reminder of the despair of life, it has come to be a reminder of hope! I need reminders that there is hope in this world. In the midst of all of life's troubles and failures, I need mental pictures to remind me that all is not lost as long as God is alive and in control of His world.

God is Alive. He is in control of this world and its destiny, but have you handed control of your life to Him. Do you know this Hope That Springs Eternal. It won't disappoint you—That's the promise of God's Word. And if it isn't yours already, then today is the best day ever to make it so. For today is the Day of Resurrection. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!