**Weekend of Sunday, April 16, 2022**

**2nd Sunday of Easter/Lectionary X/Year A**

**First Reading: Acts 2:14a, 22-32**

**Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:1-9**

**Gospel Reading: John 20:19-31**

**Sermon Title: *“A Living Hope”***

**Theme**

This epistle was written to encourage Christians experiencing hardships and suffering because of their faith in Christ. The letter opens by blessing God for the living hope we have through Christ’s resurrection even amid difficult circumstances and surroundings.

**Texts:**

1Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood:
May grace and peace be yours in abundance.3Blessed 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, 4and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, 7so 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. 8Although 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, 9for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

**Sermon**

I am inspired to focus this sermon on trials and temptations and that inspiration comes from the Second Reading from First Peter. I will eventually get to 1 Peter, but before I get there, I want to bring some clarity to the subject.

One of my favorite hymns is “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” written by Joseph M. Scriven

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Trials and temptations. What are they and what is the difference? I am so glad you asked. They are different and yet they both can have devastating or yes, positive consequences.

At any time, it seems, we could encounter a sudden problem, or a bad habit creeps in, and it feels like our life of discipleship goes off the rails. Sometimes a tragedy is so great our [faith](https://www.biblestudytools.com/topical-verses/bible-verses-for-faith-in-hard-times/) is shaken. Though trials and temptations may feel the same, there is a distinct difference between the two.

Discerning between moments of trials versus moments of temptation is an important element of the disciple's life, and can guide us in our journey to follow God’s will.

Job, the subject of the Old Testament story that bears his name, was *tested.* The story of Job is an example of "wisdom literature." It's not to be read as a true story, so don't get lost in the details. In it God let the devil do his worst against Job so that God could prove to the devil that Job, his faithful one, would not break – and Job did not break.

King David, the man after God’s own heart, was *tempted*. He already had many wives when he noticed Bathsheba bathing. He could have looked away and that would have been the end of it, but he lusted after her, and that put him on a devastating downward spiral.

While many of you will remember my sermon series on the book of James and know that book for its discussion of good works, it provides one of the most concise definitions of a trial. In his letter, James wrote,

James 1:2My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, 3because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance;

So a trial is a testing of our faith. It is a moment used by God for our growth, and to draw us closer to God. Trials come in many forms, but they typically come in the form of an *outside force* beyond our control. Illness, accidents, and job loss are easily recognizable as bad moments in life, but God is sovereign over those times; in fact, all the time.

Temptation, by comparison, is an *internal force*. Individuals can only be tempted by that which is individually tempting to that person. Some struggle with gambling, drinking, smoking, over-eating, lying, laziness – think about what you are tempted by. Many of us have one or more temptations. Once again the book of James clarifies this.

James 1:14But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it;

While one person may be able to walk by a bar on Main Street with no compulsion to go in, another may wrestle with an impulse to go in for *just one drink*. Temptation strikes where we are weakest.

But while God may test us, God never tempts us. Again from James,

James 1:13No one, when tempted, should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one.

By contrast, the Bible tells us over and over again how to respond to temptation.

2 Timothy 2:22***Shun*** youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

[1 Corinthians 6:18](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=1co+6:18)***Shun*** fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself.

[1 Corinthians 10:14](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=1co+10:14)Therefore, my dear friends, ***flee*** from the worship of idols.

The list could continue. Separating ourselves from that which tempts us does not mean that temptation will not be a struggle; or that it is not going to be difficult. It will be, but when the Christian sees temptation at the door, he or she should fight to avoid the snare. There is also a blessed reminder in [1 John](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=1jo+1:9) that we use in some of our absolutions,

1 John 1:9If we confess our sins, [God] who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We just celebrated Easter. Jesus Christ took our sinfulness, all of it – past, present, and future – to the cross and it died with him. The Easter sermon morphed a bit each time I preached it, but what I want us to know is that the sin we keep hanging around our necks has been forgiven. We must leave it at the foot of the cross because from on the cross, we were forgiven.

Peter addressed this issue in the Second Reading for today. He even dared to say that we should *rejoice* when we suffer various trials! Why would he write that? Because when we overcome them we prove the genuineness of our faith. He wrote that trials are like the crucible that purifies gold! And when we prevail against trials we give God glory and honor.

Although Peter didn’t write it, as I think about it, the same thing can be said for temptations. Though temptations are not from God, when we overcome them and choose holy and godly living we give God glory and honor.

Just imagine God and his son Jesus, reacting to all the times we overcome trials and temptations. I imagine them with big smiles on their faces and maybe high-fiving each other.

I haven’t done any research on this but I don’t believe we ever become immune to temptations. I know people who haven’t smoked in years who are attracted to that awful smell of cigarette smoke.

And I don’t have any research on this either but the way I see God using trials in my life are like little experiments to see if I can handle more – more what? It could be anything.

I was pastor of a little church up north in Cortland before Zion called me. Someone might say we had no business getting together. But over the years up north, I was on several boards and was the leader of several community and para-church ministries. I was the dean of the Eastern Conference and on Synod Council. I didn’t know it then, but now I believe God was preparing me for Zion.

Every time we overcome temptation and prevail in our trials we give God glory and honor, and like gold in a crucible, our faith and perseverance are refined and we become overcomers!

Understanding all of this, it can still be difficult to discern when we are being tempted, and when we are being tried. Sometimes the temptation comes in the trial, wanting to respond in anger, rather than in a Christ-like fashion. Ultimately, the best way to discern between trials and temptations is to take the advice of Joseph M. Scriven, the great hymn writer, and “take it to the Lord in prayer.” Let us remember that and go to God with our trials and temptations, and God will guide us best.

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

So friends, let us rejoice in the Lord always, but also when we are given the opportunity to prove our faith by overcoming trials and temptations. For God has given us a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This hope is not just any ordinary hope, but a hope that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, and it is kept in heaven for us! What a wonderful thought that we have an inheritance that is eternal, unspoiled, and unchanging, and that it is waiting for us in heaven!

Furthermore, God is guarding us through faith for salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. We will be tempted, and our faith will be tested, but this is only so that the genuineness of our faith may be revealed and result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus returns.

**Prayer**

Lord God and creator of resurrection, we praise you for your great mercy and for the gift of hope that you have given us through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let the Good News that he has the power over life and death inspire us to live lives that are pleasing to you, by overcoming our trials and temptations. To him be the glory and honor, now and forever. Amen.