

Series: Path to Glory
Title: Signs of Promise
Text: I Peter 3:18-22
Key Word: Signs
Proposition: Anyone should be on the path to glory because of the signs of promise.

An elderly man lay dying in his bed. Close to death, he smelled the aroma of his favorite chocolate chip cookies drifting up the stairs. Gathering his strength, he lifted himself from the bed. He walked slowly out of the bedroom and forced himself down the stairs.

Breathing hard, he gazed into the kitchen. Were it not for death's agony, he would have thought himself already in heaven: there, spread out upon wax paper on the kitchen table was hundreds of his favorite chocolate chip cookies. Was it heaven? Or was it a final gift of love from his devoted wife?

Mustering one final effort, he threw himself toward the table. His parched lips parted; the wondrous taste of the cookie was already in his mouth, bringing him back to life. The aged hand made its way to a cookie at the edge of the table, when it was suddenly smacked with a spatula by his wife.

"Stay out of those," she said, "they're for the funeral." ("He Thought He'd Died and Gone to Chocolate Chip Cookie Heaven," September 23, 1999, jokes@eurweb.com.)

The old man believed he was on his way to glory. He believed that his wife had one heroic act of love left in her. But he was shocked with a sure sign. Life does promise a funeral on the horizon. Life does promise that we will be smacked by troubles while on our way to glory. Life does promise that people occasionally fail to meet our expectations.

Peter wrote to Christians who had been driven out of Jerusalem and scattered throughout the Middle East. Life had smacked them hard. They were crushed, overwhelmed, devastated, and torn. Their vision of hope for a new day had been blinded by hardship, abuse, and

persecution because of their faithful obedience to the Risen Jesus. Knowing their pain, Peter, offers them comfort by reminding them that they are on a path to a glory that is not of this world. He invites them to remember that their Lord Jesus, who was also on a path to glory, was also smacked with suffering. He reminds them to hold onto signs of promise. In fact, He reminds them that there is a glory in remembering that they are not alone.

Throughout Scripture the word glory means beauty that enhances one's appearance or a high rank, like the glory of a king or the honor of a nation. Whether we are Democrat or Republican, whether we share the political views of the President of the United States, simply to be in the presence of The President of the United States would be a glorious event. John, a follower of Jesus, wrote, "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" To be in the presence of the King of Kings, the Lord of Lord's is to know His Glory.

When life reminds us of our mortality, when it smacks us hard with troubles, disappointments, and agony, we too must keep our eyes on the signs of promise. Then, like our Lord, we will also remain on the path to glory. We will see the beauty of His presence. We get a glimpse of His glory by keeping our eyes on the signs of promise. Peter identifies this promise at the cross of Christ. At the cross we see several signs of God's promise. What are these signs?

First, the Completeness of the Cross keeps us on the path to glory. Peter wrote, "*For Christ died for sins once for all...*" (3:18) John Muir tells a story about two tribes of Alaskan Native Americans who readily accepted the preaching of the gospel. One tribe quickly accepted the truth that Christ died for all, because they themselves practice it. At one time there was a

bitter war between their tribe and the Sitka tribe. Both were great warriors, evenly matched. After fighting all summer they changed tactics and fought more in the open, watching for every advantage. At a critical point one of the chiefs came out of his house into an open space midway between the fortified camps, and shouted that he wished to speak to the leader of the Sitkas.

When the Sitka chief appeared, he said: "My people are hungry. They dare not go to the streams or fields for winter supplies, and if this war goes on much longer most of my people will die of hunger. We have fought long enough; let us make peace. You brave Sitka warriors go home, and we will go home, and we will all set out to dry salmon and berries before it is too late."

The Sitka chief replied: "You may well say let us stop fighting, when you have had the best of it. You have killed ten more of my tribe than we have killed of yours. Give us ten of your men to balance our blood-account; then, and not till then, will we make peace and go home."

"Very well," replied the chief, "you know my rank. You know that I am worth 10 common men and more. Take me, and make peace."

This noble offer was accepted. The chief stepped forward and was shot down in sight of the fighting bands. Peace was thus established, and all made haste to their homes and ordinary work. That chief literally gave himself as a sacrifice for his people. He died that they might live. Therefore, when missionaries explained that when all humanity had gone astray, had broken God's laws and deserved to die, God's son came forward, and, like the chief, offered himself as a sacrifice to bring peace and set all the people of the world free, this truth was readily accepted.

"Yes, your words are good," they said, "The Son of God, the Chief of chiefs, the Maker of the entire world, must be worth more than all mankind put together; therefore, when His blood was shed, the salvation of the world was made sure." *John Muir, Travels in Alaska (Houghton, Mifflin Company,*

1915) p. 197. The entire text of Muir's book can be found at www.sierra The work of Christ is complete. He dealt with humanity's sin, our sin, in way which is adequate for all sin, for all people, for all time.

Second, the Unreasonableness of the Cross transforms the path to glory.

In a Brazilian city there is a remarkable facility. Twenty years ago the government turned a prison over to two Christians. The institution was run on Christian principles. With the exception of two full-time staff, all the work is done by inmates. Families outside the prison adopt an inmate to work with during and after his term. Chuck Colson visited the prison and found the inmates smiling - particularly the murderer, who held the keys, opened the gates and let him in. He saw men at peace. He saw clean living areas and people working hard. The walls were decorated with biblical sayings from Psalms and Proverbs. His guide escorted him to the notorious prison cell once used for torture. Today, that block houses only a single inmate. As they reached the end of a long concrete corridor and the guide put the key in the lock, he paused and asked Colson, "Are you sure you want to go in?"

"Of course," Colson replied, "I've been in isolation cells all over the world." Slowly he swung open the massive door, and Colson saw the prisoner in that punishment cell: a crucifix, beautifully carved by the inmates - the prisoner Jesus, hanging on a cross. "He's doing time for the rest of us," the guide said softly." -Max Lucado, *In the Grip of Grace* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), 113.

Peter wrote, "*Christ, the righteous died for... the unrighteous...*" (3:18) It doesn't seem reasonable for the righteous to die for the unrighteous. It doesn't make sense in our human

minds. But it is such unreasonable grace that transformed hardened criminals. Yes, such love transforms those outside prisons walls. Such grace transforms our path to glory.

Third, the Accessibility of the Cross reassures us in our journey to glory. Peter wrote “*Christ died...to bring you to God.*” (3:18) Alexandra was looking forward to her homecoming dance. She left home in high spirits, but she did not have her high school ID with her. When the man at the door refused her admission without her ID, she went home to get it.

Unable to find it, her mother went with her back to identify her and to explain. Again, Alex was refused admission. Alex had the tickets in her hand but access was still denied. Even though Alexandra is the Student Body President, plays cello in the orchestra, is on the Honor Roll, is the school's number one cheerleader, and she spent hours decorating the gym for the dance, she was denied access.

Did I mention she was homecoming queen? But, she never did get in. In a similar way, getting into heaven isn't a matter of our good deeds and accomplishments. Without Jesus Christ, we have no ID to get into heaven. Ronald Erb, Mount Pocono, Pennsylvania; source: Paul Harvey News and Comment (12-3-02)

Fourth, the infinite Range of the Cross invites all to take the path to glory. Peter wrote, “*He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.*” (3:20) Some scholars say that Christ between his death and resurrection, announced salvation to God’s faithful followers who had been waiting for their salvation during the Old Testament era. Others think that this passage says that Christ’s spirit was in Noah as he preached to those imprisoned by sin. Still others hold that Christ went to Hades, the place of the dead, to proclaim his victory and final condemnation to the fallen angels imprisoned there since Noah’s day.

Yet all believe that this passage shows that Christ's good news is not limited. It has been preached in the past as well as in the present; it has gone to the dead as well as to the living. God has given everyone the opportunity to come to him and take the path to glory. This does not though imply a second chance for the dead who rejected Christ in this life. Every human being who has ever lived, who lives now, and who is yet to be, is within range of God's grace.

Finally, the Triumph of the Cross forms our journey toward glory. When Joe quit farming and moved, he discovered he was the only Lutheran in a Catholic town. That was okay, but the neighbors had a problem with his barbecuing beef every Friday. They were not allowed to eat red meat on Fridays, but the tempting aroma was getting the best of them. Beside themselves, they got together and confronted Joe.

"Joe," they said, "since you are the only Lutheran in town and there's not a Lutheran church close by, we think you should join our church and become a Catholic." Joe thought about it for a minute and decided they were right. Joe talked to the priest, and they arranged it.

The big day came, and the priest had Joe kneel. He put his hand on his head and said, "Joe, you were born a Lutheran, you were raised a Lutheran, and now," he said as he sprinkled some incense over his head, "you are a Catholic!"

Both Joe and the neighbors were happy. But the following Friday evening, the aroma of grilled beef still drifted from Joe's yard. The neighbors went to talk to him about this, and as they approached the fence they heard Joe saying something strangely familiar to the steak: "You were born a beef, you were raised a beef and now" he said as he sprinkled salt over the meat, "you are a fish!" *(Debi Zahn, Sandwich, IL)*

Peter reminds us that baptism is a sign that we are being formed into the image of Christ by His resurrecting power. A ceremony will not change our heart just like a little salt will not change a steak into a fish. As we submit to the resurrecting power of the Risen Christ we're formed into new creatures. This submission is the sign that we're a child of the promise.

We have a special connection to those with whom we have shared in their suffering and hurt. Prayer and encouragement have united heart to heart. We also share a special connection with God, whose Son, became one with us at the cross. At the cross we see signs of promise for we are not alone. As we suffer He suffers. We love him more deeply and trust Him more fully because He has become like us. His glory becomes our glory, so He is worthy of our full, unreserved trust.

