### 1 Peter 1:3-9

### 3Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 5who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

### John 20:19-31

19On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” 22And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

24Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

26A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 27Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

28Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

29Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

30Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

**Sunday**

The alphabet of grace is full of sibilants—sounds that can't be shouted but only whispered: the sounds of bumblebees and wind and lovers in the dark, of whitecaps hissing up flat over the glittering sand and cars on wet roads, of crowds hushed in vast and vaulted places, the sound of your own breathing. I believe that in sibilants life is trying to tell us something. The trees, ghosts, dreams, faces, the waking up and eating and working of life, are trying to tell us something, to take us somewhere.  *(Frederick Buechner, 1926 - 2022)*

“The First Gift; The Lasting Gift”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

April 16, 2023

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

In the corner of the dining room in Camden is what my extended family calls “the India chair.” It is a highly ornate, tall-backed chair carved from deep, dark wood—probably rosewood. In fact, it looks a lot like two chairs that are in the Howard Room at the library, but on ours, the back is very tall, almost throne-like in its height, with carved, rounded posts and a webbed center like its seat. In my mind’s eye, I can see it in the corner of my grandmother’s dining room, and also in my mom’s den where she lived for twenty years; then it rested in the corner of her sunroom where she lived before moving into a retirement home in Camden. Soon, it will sit in my new living room, in the one place where it can best be seen, and only occasionally sat on, in hope of preserving its life. You see, my grandfather brought it home from the south in 1918, when malaria made him cut short his time as principal of Voorhees Christian College in Vellore.

It is one of the objects that have made me think about inheritances lately, as I pore over the tiny and some few larger objects Mom had collected over her lifetime, and I try to determine what I must keep and what I can feel loosened to give away. I also look at the furnishings I have brought with me from house to house, somehow feeling the houses feel like home because of the warmth of memories of the persons who first—and last—owned them. I hum throughout my packing on my own, hearing Mom and my Bam humming too. We have a relationship with those who go before us, and with those who come after us. We wonder what we leave for them, and we sometimes wonder what we have learned or gained from them. In my family, despite her own mother never having shared such a conversation with my mom or uncles, we had a couple of marked moments when Mom asked us to talk about the brass tacks of her eventual death. Ouch. I remember the first time, which was so long ago that it felt odd, and not at all sad, really. Mom was probably only around 65 or so, which feels younger by the day to me.

At that point, inheritance wasn’t anything we thought of as current, or even somehow in the realm of a definable future. We all made lists of family furniture we especially liked and enjoyed remembering whose house it had lived in before Mom’s, and different memories associated with it. Mom wanted for us to avoid some of the contention that can be a part of families after a loved one has gone. Inheritance can begin to feel like a curse rather than a living legacy. Not so our inheritance through and in Jesus Christ, with whom we share our parent, God. Still, in some ways I have found myself again thinking about inheritance, and with the help of this week’s scripture reading, have found a new kind of peace in thinking about legacies—Jesus’ legacy to us . . . and my mom’s. So, I haven’t asked you for permission, but I thank you for indulging some more personal ruminations today. Much of it was prompted by the powerful play currently running with The New Surry Theater, and in which Clair and Kim Maxwell’s daughter Bailey is one of the three principal actors. In this thought provoking and somewhat quizzical play, we are asked to ponder memory, and what constitutes reality. For me, in some of the more humorous moments, it also had me recall some of the warmth with which my mom could smile at her difficulties with memory when she first showed the signs of Alzheimer’s. I don’t mean to suggest that she or anyone else ever laughed at the situation, but that she was aware things were changing. For us, her five children, we remain grateful that Mom knew who she was and who we were until her death. As I think about inheritance in a new way while reading this morning’s scripture, I also find myself grateful that Mom took her early issues with memory as motivation to speak with us very openly about her future plans.

Part of the gift of her awareness of what was going on is that she put her affairs in order, as we somehow euphemistically refer to end of life issues. So, Mom thought about inheritance. She spoke a lot about the one chief asset she owned, which is our family cottage on Megunticook Lake in Camden, ME. I and my siblings are going to sell it at the end of summer 2024 and were remembering on the phone the other day how she had said at one point, she was thinking of selling it, in her words, “so that we could enjoy now the money that we would inherit when she’s gone.” Mom said that she would like to see us enjoy our inheritance while she was still around. Reading through today’s scripture lessons, I think I understand this a bit more clearly. Some legacies are best lived in the now of relationship, and others are things that we look forward to—not morbidly, but in that we recognize their staying power—their eternal nature. It is difficult for us to say goodbye to the camp now because we said goodbye to Mom six years ago. It might have been easier together. We often speak about the way we grew up without many “things” and certainly fewer “luxuries,” but that we did have love and memories of experiences galore. The bond among all five of us and even among the next generation cousins is a certain legacy we guard carefully for Mom’s sake.

So, there is stuff, like the India chair; there are thoughts and musings, like those prompted by the play “The Body of Water,” and there are memories of gatherings, of love, of relationship. What a gift to me are this week’s scripture lessons. Lessons they are. They teach me a lot. Maybe you haven’t thought a lot about this phrasing: scripture lessons. We *learn* from the sacred texts that are the foundation of our Christian tradition. In this week after Easter, a so-called “low Sunday,” the lessons are great. Jesus’ disciples are reeling. Despite the stories they have heard about the empty tomb and the women’s excited sharing of Jesus’ resurrection, they don’t know what to think. They probably don’t know what to do. They are gathered in the room where they have once gathered with their dear friend, and they are afraid. Their identity has been forged by this relationship over the years, and without Jesus among them they aren’t quite certain who they are supposed to be. Maybe you have felt this kind of loss before. I have, and I anticipate feeling this way again.

But the *lesson* the Gospel of John teaches us this morning, and the lesson that the rock of Jesus’ trusted disciple Peter brings to our hopeful attention is that change is not always a bad thing, and the gifts of relationship and of inheritance are great, even in the face of most significant change. We have an eternal Parent, God, who loves us dearly and who wants our joy eternally. Peter teaches us that we have a lot to look forward to in heaven. Good. Sometimes when life is difficult, and for some folks even sometimes unbearably hard, the hope that comes from our faith in resurrected life eternally is sustaining in ways that earthly promises simply can’t be. We can look around, as some dear friends are doing only recently, and think that what this life offers is misery without interruption. My faith in Jesus, and the example of joy in the face of tremendous adversity my own mother has shared, tells me that there is always the possibility for renewal and for an as-yet-unseen positive outcome.

Peter knows this kind of hope and faith isn’t easy to maintain, however. He names the way we are kept at a distance from what will be ours when he writes, “This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 5who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” However, he also reminds us that the gift in faith is not only to honor Jesus, and sometime down the line. There is a present gift to us in faith, even while we wait for its eternal fulfillment. “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Yes, God, please save us. Save us from the worries that pile up. Save us from the destruction of relationships that have been what motivated and sometimes sustained us. Save our souls from the damnation that comes in having no hope, because we are distant from you. Thank you, dear God, for Jesus and your redeeming grace.

Yes, grace is eternal, and grace is also now. God didn’t want us to have to wait for our inheritance, never enjoying its gifts until later. God loved us so much that God became one of us, and in Jesus, our Christ, has given us life lessons for the present that already sustain us toward the future. Remember again that room locked against those who would continue to persecute them. The disciples, in their fear and sadness have locked themselves away from the world, but they don’t stay there. And remember Jesus? He hasn’t stayed in the tomb either. Raised from the dead, Jesus enters the locked rooms of our lives, passing the fear and sadness that take from our enjoyment of this life, and Jesus brings us His peace. That is the first and the lasting gift, through the power of the Holy Spirit. We have it now. We can choose to know it and to move forward in that knowledge or we can keep ourselves locked in the rooms that offer only temporary relief from sadness and fear. We can remain angry and unforgiving, or we can remember the lessons of forgiveness that frees us. We can imagine that heaven and God’s gifts to us exist only in a kind of never land of future opportunity, or we can know that in *this moment*, we can live into our inheritance as children of God. We can move forward trusting in the hope of resurrection and in the possibility of new joy. This is our inheritance. It begins now, and it extends into the heaven of eternity. Thanks be to God. Amen.