

It is the year 20xx, and what remains of humanity struggles for existence. Maybe it was a nuclear war? Maybe it was fossil fuels running out, or another precious resource like fresh water leading to resource wars? Perhaps it was climate change, or a virus that made vast amounts of people into zombies.

Whatever the cause of this catastrophe, humans live in this world, though barely. These remnants of humanity realise that governments have fallen. Society has crumbled. Perhaps this story even takes place years after this collapse of social structure. Buildings that we stripped away soil and trees to create are now overrun with moss and vegetation. Tall towers are crumbling and when you find a location with electricity it is an absolute relief. The remaining humans slowly find each other, slowly form groups to assist each other but some grow power hungry and it causes conflict for the group.

For anyone sitting here saying this sounds like hundreds of post-apocalyptic stories across movies, tv shows, books and videogames, I won't shy away from the fact that I delight in being a geek. Anyone who has ever seen the countless photos I keep on my phone of model kits I build of fictional giant robots can attest to that. I never personally got into shows like the Walking Dead or the Last of Us. What I have gotten into, however, is our fascination with the concept of the world as we know it being completely destroyed and what we as individuals are willing to do in order to survive.

What I find so fascinating about our obsession with world ending catastrophe is figuring out how to move on when everything we knew has fallen apart. There is an inherently hopeful nature to it. In so many ways, just like with the animals of this world, whatever brings humanity to its state in these stories could have been a mass extinction.

With a snap.(snaps) All of us could be gone.

Yet in each of these stories, there are always survivors. Struggling, and often morally complicated individuals. Now, depending on the nature of the media, where those morals end up results in a sliding scale of optimism versus cynicism.

At the beginning, just when shows like these were becoming popular, there was an inherently dystopian negative aspect of it. Think of these stories becoming a study on all of the darkest and worst traits of humanity played out on screen. They are gory, uncomfortable social commentary of the likes of books like *The Lord of the Flies*, where everyone progressively becomes worse versions of themselves. We are told by these end of the world stories that this violent, self-serving version of humanity is representative of our truest nature.

More recently, I've noticed these stories have felt different. The darkness is still there. That need for survival and willingness to do so at any cost is present but survival is no longer enough. Instead, these stories have become focused on our need for human connection. How our values even in these situations are the line between whether we remain ourselves or lose ourselves completely. In the depth of these narratives is a chilling question: if survival comes at the cost of all you are, if seeing the next sunrise means losing all that makes you a person, did you actually survive?

Perhaps most beautifully though is the message that even if the world we know is gone there is still something in our lives that makes life worth living. We are shown characters who cling to these things, whether miraculous or mundane, and in it, they find hope.

So, where do you find your hope?

In today's scripture, the author of this first letter of Peter wants us to examine our hope. Here in this address, the writer of Peter speaks to us directly, and he does not mince words. The first thing he asks us is: who will harm us if we are eager to do good?

Anyone familiar with the saying "No good deed goes unpunished" immediately realises that the world we live in is complicated. Doing the right thing doesn't translate to honours and awards. It can instead lead to persecution, humiliation and even death.

So why is it that you hope?

The author of Peter again is direct with us. He tells us why he hopes, and why his audience, his students, should share in that hope as fellow Christians. That even if our good deeds are not rewarded by the world around us, it does not mean that we did it for nothing. That God is always watching and knows what we have done and not done, even if the world does not. What we do is so much more than our actions. It is a reflection of who we are. Even if the world around us punishes us for kindness that is born out of love, we know we have chosen a path that helps us become better versions of ourselves.

God finds victory where there should have been defeat. Jesus died a slow, painful, state mandated and torturous execution. As far as the Empire of Rome, his society, was concerned, Christ was an enemy deserving of death. In the end though, his death of the flesh has allowed him to be alive in the spirit. This is our hope.

The hope that death is inevitable, but it is not the end.  
The hope that resurrection awaits us all.

The hope that though good deeds do not protect us from suffering, our benevolence could heal and restore a small part of this world.

Where do you find your hope?

Peter advises us not to be afraid of telling people that it is in our faith. That we hope because we are Christians. Yet, in our modern world, the term Christian has become a difficult and loaded one. We are followers of Jesus, but we are not the only ones. We act in the love we are shown by Christ. I am sure all of us, however, know someone or know of someone who calls themselves Christians and yet they act in ways that are judgemental and harm those around them.

Maybe you are or were that person at some point?

There are people who call themselves Christians just the same as we do. Yet they have lost the way of love. We see it happening in the scapegoating of the 2SLGBTQ+ community as violent attackers who target children. In laws protecting Trans people being stripped away in the United States. “We are Christians”, the leaders of these hateful campaigns tell us, and “this is returning things to God's world”.

Christian has become synonymous with White Nationalism for many. Gone from their understanding is the plurality of Christianity. Even in the earliest days, our faith was one of many practices. There was never one way to be Christian. To be frank, we all share fault for this association of Christianity with hatefulness by being reluctant to admit to our Christian faith. By never offering a wider, diverse example through ourselves. By letting the loudest voices that claim Christianity bear narrow, often toxic world views.

Believe it or not, in this time where we worry about the longevity of our churches, our faith is growing. It is growing in places desperate for liberation and often denied it because their people have dark skin. As each culture encounters Jesus, the receivers always find a message meant for them by God. It happens even in our own North American history: slave masters introduced Christianity to the enslaved as a way to keep them obedient – stressing such messages in the Bible about accepting your place in the world as accepting enslavement. The enslaved people were instead inspired to learn how to read and in doing so learned of the passages in the Bible that speak of liberation.

So...where does that leave us?

We cannot just simply stand by and claim we are different, or that some aren't true Christians. It allows us to take no responsibility. Instead, we are challenged to proclaim our love of God and Christ as loudly as we can as we let love guide our every breath, every move and every action. We are asked to challenge those who choose not to act in love. To appeal to the need in all of us humans to find something greater to our lives than mere survival into the next day.

So tell me, why is it that you hope?

If Christ is your guiding light, you already know what you need to do. Jesus told us that it makes no sense to put a lamp under a basket. Instead, let's put that light on the lampstand.

So tell me, why is it that you hope?

God wants us to proclaim it gently but loudly.

May it be so!

Thanks be to God, Amen