



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

February 24, 2021

**DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC
By Rev. Maria Szabo Berces**



Source: Our Daily Bread

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

Many of you are well aware that last week we entered into a new church season called Lent. The aim of these weeks that lead us up to Good Friday and Easter is to prepare us to receive the great love of God offered to humanity in Jesus' sacrifice, and the joy of his victory over death.

During the "Faith on the Move" online Lenten Bible study this question was raised to those logged in: *"What kind of preparations are you doing for Good Friday and Easter in your community and in your personal life?"* Isn't it a good inquiry as we can see all the chocolate bunnies and other easter decorations while we do our grocery shopping?

Displaying bunnies, lambs, chickens and eggs in our homes reminds us externally that it's a season of something important. However, to really receive the benefits of this celebration we need a deeper grounding than home décor.

For a number of people giving up something is the way for contemplative thinking and preparations for these festivals. Others focus on doing something for our spiritual health that we haven't been doing otherwise.

Discovering God's unimaginable promises for us can be a good route to let the Easter message sink in. We don't have to be convicted of any crime to experience the burden of failures and the sense of futility. As we struggle with our weaknesses or losses, the Holy One continuously sends us messages of **"great and precious promises"** (2 Peter 1:4)

While it is about a *future*, we can also taste the results in our present time as we *"make every effort"* as Peter suggests: **"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love."** (2 Peter 1:5-7) If we look at it this way, it requires determination and struggle from our side. We don't like to be "ineffective" or "unproductive" in anything we do, do we?

However, when we consider that the understanding and goodness that we yearn for is really the doing of God's Spirit, we are reminded of Jesus' teaching: **"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ... If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"** (Luke 11:9-13)

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



Unimaginable Promises

He has given us his very great and precious promises.

2 Peter 1:4

READ 2 PETER 1:2-8

In our moments of greatest failure, it can be easy to believe it's too late for us, that we've lost our chance at a life of purpose and worth. That's how Elias, a former inmate at a maximum-security prison in New York, described feeling as a prisoner. "I had broken . . . promises, the promise of my own future, the promise of what I could be."

It was Bard College's "Prison Initiative" college degree program that began to transform Elias' life. While in the program, he participated on a debate team, which in 2015 debated a team from Harvard—and won. For Elias, being "part of the team . . . [was] a way of proving that these promises weren't completely lost."

A similar transformation happens in our hearts when we begin to understand that the good news of God's love in Jesus is good news for us too. *It's not too late*, we begin to realize with wonder. *God still has a future for me.*

And it's a future that can neither be earned nor forfeited, dependent only on God's extravagant grace and power (2 Peter 1:2-3). A future where we're set free from the despair in the world and in our hearts into one filled with His "glory and goodness" (v. 3). A future secure in Christ's unimaginable promises (v. 4); and a future transformed into the "freedom and glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). – By **Monica La Rose**

REFLECT & PRAY

Jesus, some days all I can see is the ways I've disappointed myself and others, the ways I've broken the future I've dreamed of. Help me to see the unchanging beauty of the future I find in You. Amen.

Why can it be difficult for us to accept "unearned" grace and love? How does it touch your heart to consider that in God's eyes you have a future filled with unimaginable beauty?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

Second Peter 1 reminds us that God is the One who provides the power we need to live our life in Christ (v. 3). One of the ways He does this is by giving us the Holy Spirit. The characteristics we display—the fruit of the indwelling Spirit—have strong implications for the way we live (vv. 5-9; see Galatians 5:22-23). But whose fruit is it? It's the Spirit's. The Holy Spirit is the agent, the source, and the power that produces that fruit.

Adapted from [Live Free: A Fresh Look at the Fruit of the Spirit.](#)

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