

Finding Hope

I) Gloom, Despair, and Agony on Me (Song)

A) Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God is right along side helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. The Spirit does our praying for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans.

- 1) The Spirit hears our songs of despair and misery.
- 2) The Spirit prays FOR us when we have lost the words.

B) The Spirit comes to us in the night and asks us:

- 1) what God asked Solomon- "What do you want from me?...what can I give to you to help you through this?"
- 2) The Spirit asks what Jesus asked, "Do you want to be healed?"(John 5: 6)

C) The Rev. Dr. Gilbert Bowen put it this way:

- 1) What are you looking forward to?
- 2) What out there in the future really excites you, grabs you, makes you want to get up and get going in the morning?
- 3) What are you living toward that fills your days with meaning, your months with promise, your years with hope?

D) This is where many of us get stuck . . . we're not sure.

II) Despair comes when we run out of hope.

A) Hope is defined as a feeling of expectation and desire for something to happen or as a person or thing that gives cause for hope.

- 1) Studies have proven that hope improves the immune system and, actually increases hormones of well-being in the body.
- 2) In the verses from Romans just previous to this week's passage, Paul says: who hopes for what they already have? But, if we do hope for what we do not already have, we wait for it patiently.

B) So, if we are stuck in doom and gloom, how do we find hope? How do we even know what to hope for?

1) Fantasy or imagination – Daydreaming

(a) Teachers and parents tend to discourage this most of the time, but, they really shouldn't.

- Fantasy allows our minds to create.
- Fantasy allows our minds to rest from the day to day grind: the doom and gloom of the sinfulness and fallen-ness which surrounds us (especially in this age of instant news).

- (b) Remember on a pretty day finding a soft spot of grass and lying on your back to look at the clouds?
- All sorts of animals, plant, scenes would emerge in the clouds.
 - Magically, the images would shift into something else.
 - As you lay there your mind could rest and soon you were dreaming of what you could become – like those images in the sky.
- (c) God instructs us to rest – take a break from life’s burdens
- Recreation literally means re-create
 - We are to give our minds and bodies time to restore so we are ready to begin again in the creation process with God who leads us
 - So many of us fill our recreation time with “doing” that we lose the purpose
 - Granted, we are very sedentary people so some exercise may be recreating for us all-but we also need time to imagine and dream
- (d) Think about how many inventions we have because of “fantasy”
- New worlds were discovered because people like Columbus dreamed they existed
 - Buck Rogers took us to space
 - Dick Tracy gave us the wrist communicator which morphed into the communicator on Star Trek which become – cell phones!
 - I could go on but you see where I’m going
- (e) I think this is why the Biblical heroes, again and again, paint pictures of the future.
- In the Old Testament the prophets dream of a day when everyone shall sit under his own vine and fig tree and when the lion shall lie down with the lamb.
 - Jesus sees a future of banquet when all shall be welcome at the table and John speaks of a city of God where God will dwell with us and we shall be his people.
- (f) Allow yourself to dream again – get away from the negative news for a while and think about what “could be”
- 2) Then we need faith, the faith that the future will be good no matter what comes. [The Spirit], knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our condition, and keeps us present before God. That’s why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. God knew what God was doing from the very beginning.

(a) Much of the sadness and despair is the downside of too narrow and unrealistic hopes, too many self-centered goals.

(b) A little second grader went to parochial school. Her teacher said, "One day as part of religion class, a teacher asked the children to draw a picture of what they'd do if they could spend the day with Jesus. The pupils tackled the project eagerly. After a few minutes, this one little girl came up to the teacher's desk with her almost finished drawing in hand. "Miss Lopresti," she said, "How do you spell Nieman Marcus?"

(b) We become too invested in a specific script or story

- "If I don't get that promotion...if my children don't settle near by and come by...if Jim doesn't make the football team...if we can't afford a certain life style and run with certain people...then life will be a failure, the childhood dream, the college ambition, will burn out in ashes.
- When we wrap our whole life, all our emotions and energy around one narrow possibility and then lose, we lose life itself in despair and defeat. (The Rev. Dr. Gilbert Bowen)
- I was talking to some friends the other night about a class I took which had us put down what we wanted to achieve in the next 10 years

(i) 10 years down the road, I found the list and I HAD pretty much achieved everything I had listed

(ii) The question came – "Now what?"

(c) A psychiatrist commented that by 35 people have gained their list only to find some of these things they wished for very un-fulfilling. He comments: It is as though God cursed them. He gave them what they wanted.

(d) So it is no accident that in Old and New Testament, real hope is always linked to a larger world than the self, to the world of justice and love. Paul writes later in this letter to the Romans, "Each of you must consider his neighbor and think what is for his or her good. Accept one another...and the God of hope will fill you with all joy and peace."

(e) "God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same line as the life of his Son."

(f) You say, "But I TRY to be like Jesus...it's impossible!"

(g) "So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us?"

(h) God is still asking the question, "What do you want? What do you need?"

(i) And when we read scripture, we know that God already knows what we need. God sent Jesus to show us how to live but also to be the final sacrifice so we can have a new start – EVERY DAY.

(j) God wants us to have abundant life and tells us NOTHING can get between his will for us and us. "There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture...None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us."

(j) This is where our hope lies: Jesus will ALWAYS be there for us.

3) So in the biblical faith hope is always spoken of as hope in God.

(a) Hope is tied not to our own dreams and desires finally, but hope resting in the conviction that *whatever comes* God has something **surprising that will turn out to work for our good and future.**

(b) And I confess that as I look back over my life now, I see that some of the best things that have happened to me have been things, indeed people, whom were better than all I could have fantasized for my future.

C) Lastly, real hope is active, not passive. Hope has feet.

1) The Jordan does not part until the priests are willing to put their feet in the water.

2) Jesus does not know resurrection until he is willing to walk the way to the cross.

3) In this sense, active hope is so much more than just waiting around for something good to happen.

4) *It is acting in such a way as to help create the future hoped for.*

(a) Again, sometimes "we do not do the things we want and do the things we do not want to do"

(b) But remember, "With God on our side like this, how can we lose?"

III) Conclusion

Pessimism and despair work to bring into being the very future we fear.

Hope helps shape the future which Jesus has prepared for us (heaven now).

We can have hope because God will pick us up, dust us off, and give us a little shove in the right direction – EVERY TIME.

Praise be to God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Amen.

Please stand, if able, and sing our hymn of response: