

SERMON: FAITH & DOUBT: *“What’s Hope Got to Do With it?”*

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, March 14, 2021 St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church.

[Before we begin, Last Week/Question: “In the garden/naked/afraid – and you hid yourself? GOT A REACTION! Didn’t mean to offend/metaphorically pointing out: this is the archetypal pattern of our response to our sin/faults/failings: caught in the wrong/exposed-vulnerable/embarassed-ashamed/frightened-scared; definitely not feeling comfortable/secure/safe. How we feel when caught/cover-up only makes it worse! God knows what we’ve done/where we are/how we feel – only wants us to believe in His love/grace/care for us – not to be afraid!]

While I grew up in a ‘Churched family’ – [Ministers on both sides of the Atlantic/Pacific – for generations/named after Grandfather (uncle) both ministers/Missionary parents/MishKid! Went to Church/not the 1st to arrive/but last to leave! International/ecumenical – even traveled around the world using Church-network] – I came to the ministry through my MA in English/Modern Poetry. For me, faith wasn’t so much talked about as it was lived out: like the air I breathed. This meant that I couldn’t articulate [cogently/coherently/convincingly] what I inherently knew/accepted/believed: that God was a God of grace – and that I was loved/saved despite not being worthy of that love/grace/salvation. Theology [creeds/confessionals/dogma/philosophy/etc...] seemed to detract/cloud/even obscure the simplicity of what faith is – an offer of hope.

[English Major/Professor–Regan thought her children were going to get free tuition! God/Church: “pulled me back in” TSEliot-Modern American poetry – but studied William Blake/John Milton/Dante/Homer – agree with Northrop Fyre: Great Code/Bible as literature – ‘a work’ that is centripetally(focused on 1 core message) that “is a unity of narrative/imagery/implicit metaphor” in images/stories/myth/metaphor that all point toward the revelation of God’s hope for transformation/new life. Big words for a grace guy!]

I mention all of this because we’ve been talking about faith/nature of faith/what it means to have faith – even doubts [Faith & Doubt: ‘trust’/‘fear’] – and faith, at its core is about choosing/embracing a narrative/story/message to live by. Nobody lives without some kind of guiding belief/narrative/story that helps us make sense of the world/life. For instance, nihilists believe that the universe is nothing but an accidental collect/collision of stuff, jostling around/no rhyme/reason/purpose. The belief in ‘nothing’ runs counter to what God offers: “faith is a gift of God” says our Living Faith document; “it is trust in God” that “by faith we receive the very life of God/God knows/loves/and pardons us.” Rather than saying ‘no’ to life/ “faith is a response to God’s presence in the midst of life: it says “yes” to the God who is here.” (LF 6.1-3) And, even in times of doubt, God’s promised offer [better day/new life/heaven-earth/Jerusalem] give us confidence/hope.

[Faith is a narrative of hope: Movie-Bishop’s Wife(original: Cary Grant-angel/David Niven-Bishop)-opening scene: Grant/angel on a snowy street/listening to the thoughts/watching the people. Helps a blind man across the street/stops traffic! Man says he has a Dr’s appointment:sight/“has hopes” – faith=hope: aspirational-day will come/peace will win out/needs met/health improve/death isn’t the last word... Hope looks over the horizon to that place promised/restored.]

Last week we heard the story of the fall of Adam/Eve – and how they hid/lied from/to God; actions that broke the trust required for that first relationship to continue – that resulted in their being exiled from the Garden of Eden, ‘cursed’ to suffer/know pain/loss/fear/die: all because of one man’s lie. And ever since we’ve been longing/dreaming of getting back to the Garden – back/restore our relationship/redeem ourselves/repair the damage done to this world/lives/return home. [God’s a baseball fan!] Our second reading – Revelation vision of new heaven/earth/Jerusalem – is a glimpse of the hope at the core of the Bible/Gospel, a hope offered in/through Jesus Christ/Son of God who’s death/resurrection frees/d us from the suffering/futility/bondage/decay of this world/life: a future glory in a place prepared/waiting for us where we will received/welcomed up/into/back home with God.

[JO: “If there’s a God/have hope for home/if no God/we’re homeless”/“Homelessness/clue to our condition”/crave security/safety/sanctuary of “home”/“Home=Belonging/valued/loved” – Prodigal son/return ‘home’ – acceptance/welcome, not about deserving/about grace. But, still we doubt.]

We started this series/Lent with me stating that, first; we all live/are saved – by the mercy/grace/love of God/saved/redeemed in/through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And, with me following up saying, that second, we all live/will die – at the mercy of what we believe. What this means is that what we choose to believe/hold to be true, has consequences/will determine our fate: the cost of living by fear is death.

Friends, fear is what fueled Adam/Eve’s doubts/undermined their/our faith/trust in God. But even then, God offered hope – and hope is what enabled/s faith to survive in hard times. The Bible tells us that God created earth/us to be-at home-with us....and that God longs for us to come home, redeemed/restored/welcomed up/into Father’s/God’s house/home – to a place prepared for us where God’s steadfast mercy/grace/love/blessings that “never cease/His mercies never come to an end/new every morning; great is God’s faithfulness.” So, what does hope have to do with it? Hope is what lifts us/up faith, it looks forward to a better/new day/world/life, - a future of/filled with hope. When in doubt/choose hope. Amen.