

SERMON: *“HOPE: A Series for Hard Times”*

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, June 6, 2021, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

[Up/to-the-right:properity/success/better world – after Centuries of progress/enlightenment/economic growth the trajectory of History/human achievement seemed set:what could go wrong? 1947:WHAuden poem – “Age of Anxiety” – marked the reality: 2 world wars/global pandemic/Great depression/threat of nuclear destruction/cold war – anything but perfect world. Since:globalization/international capitalism/inequity/countless wars/terrorism/man-made problems(We’ve replaced God as the source of our hope):What hasn’t gone wrong? 15 months of COVID19 – health/economic concerns discontent/pessimism/division/racial suspicion/hatred/fear:future no longer certain, truth threatened. Feels like we’ve lost something?/How afraid/hopeful are you? Yet God has an answer...]

“Do not be afraid,” God said to Abram in Genesis. “Do not be afraid,” Jesus says to his frightened disciples. “Do not be afraid,” the angel said to the grieving disciples at the empty tomb. The phrase “Do not be afraid,” echoes throughout the Bible – 62 times/spoken by God, Jesus or angels: why then, don’t we trust/believing it? Why are we so afraid?

[Modern sociologists believed that Ancient peoples turned to God for hope/because they didn’t understand things they couldn’t control:Faith about something deeper. Faith not about controlling ‘out there’/but ‘in here:’ it’s a search for purpose/meaning. Progress isn’t about leaving faith/without faith, progress/future lacks hope! Because hope moves us beyond ourselves/circumstances – toward love/mercy/grace:sacrificial relationships that make us/you/me/world a better place.]

In the Bible, “Do not be afraid,” means ‘believe me,’/‘trust me,’/‘have faith.’ But “Do not be afraid,” while it sounds easy, isn’t in a world where we’re afraid of the unknown that’s out there. The world out there is a scary/evil place filled with violence/hatred. It’s big/impersonal world that we no longer understand/where we don’t seem to matter. We’re also afraid of the unknown inside our bodies – of the shadows in the creases/folds of our bodies – of the aches/pains that grow exponentially/inexplicably. We’re even fearful of what we put into our mouths from the food we eat/water we drink/air we breathe. “Do not be afraid” sounds simple, but it’s not when, for many today, life is a day to day struggle in which their fear of the unknown has become a fear of everything. As a result, we blot our fears out with the many fixes available to us: choosing to live comfortably numb so we don’t have to be challenged by what we can’t control – afraid to let go/or change who we are/how we live/act. To this, I say: “Do not be afraid” is God’s way of saying He has an answer/antidote to/for our fears.

[Year’s ago:coffee shop tip jar sign – “If you fear change, leave it here.” Easy! “Do not be afraid”!Why? The Cross!Grace of the Cross says: we have nothing to fear/if we do:leave it with Him/Jesus/God. Have faith. Have hope!]

From the beginning, the People of God knew/believed/lived out/in this hope:That God’s “steadfast love never ceases/mercies never comet to an end:new every morning/Great is God’s faithfulness.” Later, the Church/Christians distinguished themselves against the crises of history with its/their belief that life/this life is transitory/part of a larger/God’s story gave Christians meaning/purpose/hope. We know this because the word used in the New Testament/“*Elpida*”(Greek:Ελπίδα-meaning “hope”/“profound certainty”) speaks to a

belief/hope that went beyond mere wishful thinking: Christians, even in the hardest circumstances knew/trusted/were confident in God's promised hope/known in/through the resurrection of Jesus as the foundation of their faith/hope/lives.

The Christians Peter wrote to had already "suffer[ed] various trials" but because of God's "great mercy [they/we were] given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" – ours/forever. Yes, says Peter/as we know, this "*inheritance*" hope comes at a cost – "*trials*"/"*testing by fire*"/ "*suffering*" – but the resurrection (for us as an Easter People) means we have a hope for the future not based on this world/but on a "*living hope*" God/God's mercy/grace/steadfast love/promises. Friends, this hope/belief/"*profound certainty*" in the resurrection gives us a "*new birth*" into a life lived for the risen Jesus/faith in the resurrection births in us that hope that sustains us in/through anything – even death.

As Regan/Simpson said, this/our Summer series on "HOPE" is meant to remind us of our hope – the hope that is founded on Christ and the love/grace of God: a hope that "does not disappoint us." But, as we go forward, let this/the resurrection be the template/foundation of our hope – a living hope in a living/risen Lord/Jesus; a belief in God's Promise made/Promise kept – so that knowing this promised hope is/will be ours will enable us to live lives of hope – even in hardship/hard times. Amen.