

SERMON: *“HOPE: A Certain Hope”*

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, June 13, 2021, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

As we continue our series on “HOPE” we need to clear something up: We’re misusing the word “*Hope*.” It’s understandable, we hear/use the word “hope” so often/frequently/incorrectly without understanding it/carelessly: “*Hope*” is not about wishful thinking – a wish not based in reality, (insert your own Leafs/St Stanley Cup comment): “*Hope*” – especially Biblical “*Hope*” – is something else/different. When we read the word “*Hope*” in the Bible/hear it come from prophets/angels/apostles/Jesus – even God, it is anything but ‘wishful thinking.’ This “*Hope*” means “*confident assurance*.” In fact the word used for “*Hope*” in the New Testament/“*Elpida*”(Greek) also means/used to mean “*profound certainty*” – and “*Certainty*” means “*firm conviction*”/“*a fact that is definitely true/going to happen*”/“*being reliably true*.” In both English/Greek(NT language), hope can be a verb/noun: We “*can hope/trust*” (Greek:verb – ‘*elpizo*’), or we “*can have hope, a confident expectation*”(Greek:noun – ‘*elpis*’). It is ‘*elpis*’ that Paul uses to describe the certain(“*known for sure*”/“*unquestionable*”) hope (a double/compounded/repeated meaning) that we can have in God/God’s grace/promises – God’s saving plan in/through the resurrection. But how does/can one acquire/find/have such a certain hope?

[So far: Paul/Romans – suffering-endurance-character=hope/that doesn’t disappoint! LW: Peter/Letter wrote of God’s “great mercy/given to us/a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead/an inheritance that is imperishable/undefiled/unfading” – that could be ours/forever! But, Peter also wrote that this “inheritance”/hope comes at a cost: “trials”/“testing by fire”/ “suffering” – death/crucifixion – but the resurrection give us hope! Hope not based on this world/but on God/God’s mercy/grace/steadfast love/promises. We’re to have hope/but the path to experiencing real/true/certain hope is not easy/hard/painful....]

It was/is also hard/difficult to believe! While the heart of our faith is Gospel/Good News – that God’s power/mercy/grace brings salvation – it does so by challenging our understanding of how the world works: It defies the ‘ways’ of how we live/do things/believe things ‘should be.’ Life/experience has taught us: ‘*You’ve got to have hope – but don’t get your hopes up.*’ The world teaches the very same thing. Last Easter, we were saying, “*I hope this virus’ gone by summertime.*” Last summer; “*I hope we can get back to work quickly.*” Last December; “*I hope our problems go away in 2021.*” Don’t get your hopes up, because hope in this world-not certain/let you down. Who hasn’t had their hopes/dreams/plans dashed? It’s hard to have certain hope in uncertain times!

[1527/Bubonic plague: Martin Luther-ordered to leave Germany to ‘save his life’ stayed/ministered to sick/dying-turning home into a hospital! Wrote a public letter (“Whether one may flee for a deadly plague”: BTW-leaving/staying both “right/good.”)-fearless in face of death! Because of the hope: fearlessness comes from the Gospel/Jesus/resurrection!]

Paul wrote that “*faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*”(Heb 11:1) But it is also based on experience! In both our readings today, Paul writes of how his hope is rooted in things that are known/true/reasonable – evidence of God’s grace/hope at work in/through history/people/events. In the first reading, Paul makes the case that the Gospel/Good News/hope

offered by God HAPPENED: Jesus was real – He revealed God’s saving plan/purpose for us/died-for us/AND was resurrected from the dead! By telling the ‘origin story’ of the Gospel, Paul tells the world what Jesus did for us/him/you/me in history, regardless of how unbelievable to a doubting world.

[What is your reason/story? I can’t claim ‘road-side’ conversion like Paul’s – but like Paul, I, too, am a grace-guy. I know I’m a flawed, sinful man/deserving of judgement yet, by God’s grace I know the unconditional love of God/blessed beyond deserving/and saved all because of Jesus’ death/resurrection. I’m a ‘glass is always/more than half-full’ person (Ross Family motto: Spem Successus Alit/Success through hope/!) All that I have/am is by God’s grace, not because of what I’ve done, but because of what God in/through Jesus did for me!]

Paul makes it clear: real hope is impossible apart from God since God is the object/source of our hope: Hope is what God “pours”/forms/”purifies” in us/it’s a gift/it’s a gift from God/not something we can make/earn/buy. In other words, we are saved by what God has done – and Paul fills his writing with reasons to believe: evidence/witness accounts/his own personal encounter to explain why he believes in the “*grace of God that is with [him]*”/that saved a wretch like him – all because of the resurrection. In his encounter with Jesus, Paul knew he deserved to be judged and condemned – instead, because of God’s “*unchangeable character*”/grace that offered him a “*hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.*” The Gospel gave/gives Paul/us/me/you freedom from our fear/doubts/debts/sin/death in/through the death of Jesus and the resurrection – but only if we believe in it. I believe/am confident in/have a certain hope in the God who knows me and still loves me. I hope that you do too! Amen.