

SERMON: “HOPE: A Personal Hope”

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, July 11, 2021, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

[Said before: Grace Guy – also a HOPE guy! Both the same: both are gifts! Grace-not something you get/earn/buy: given (good sleep/hugs/someone loving you/life/salvation). HOPE-not something that is ‘yours’/you make/fake/take: something you have in something/someone else (health/future/salvation). Both come from/point to God/Christ-promises/presence: foundation of faith against the fear/doubt of this world.]

As I just said, “HOPE” is what sets us apart from the rest of the world. This is because our “HOPE” is not based on the temporal ‘things’/people of this world, but is founded on/in Jesus, who came to be-with us/live as one-of us, who suffered everything this world could throw at Him, and died for us/as us – and on His resurrection that offered us the hope of salvation/eternity. While this might sound theoretical/theological; it’s not: the hope that God, in/through Jesus, offers us, first/foremost, is a personal HOPE – meant each of us/for me/you/anyone who seeks a relationship with God.

But how do we know this? First, we find this promise in/through Scripture. At funerals – as I’m about to read from Scripture, I tell them that the Bible is our faith story/story of God’s promise/plan for our salvation – written to provide comfort/instruction/hope by countless men/women who came to a profound experience/understanding of God in the midst of their lives/suffering/hardship (Psalms). Second, we find encouragement in this promise as it was lived out in/through His encounters/relationship with those He met/came to be-with us/revealed Himself to those who/like us, who doubt/wrestle if God’s promised grace/hope is truly for us.

[TK: Book/ Hope in Times of Fear, focuses on 5/those who Jesus “came to” after His resurrection: Mary Magdalene/John/Thomas/Peter/Paul. And this is THE POINT: Jesus/God “approached” them/where they were/where their need was. They/like us were blind to seeing Jesus for who He was/is: didn’t know Him/questioned/doubted. Jesus/God calls/comes to us/loves us FIRST!]

What is clear through the accounts of those who Jesus came to after His resurrection is that our faith/Christianity is based on an intimate/personal relationship/Communion, initiated by God/Jesus, between God/Creation – a relationship that allows us/anyone to KNOW God. Jesus tells us that to “know”/recognize/experience/accept/trust/ God personally is to have eternal life (John 17:3) And, because of God’s grace/Jesus is not some dead 2000-year-old teacher/ the resurrection happened/He is a risen, living Saviour/of the Holy Spirit we can such a relationship. It is THIS personal relationship that makes our transformation from the ruined/wreck of our past lives into a beloved/claimed/carried/named child of God possible: God’s saving grace for each of us/you/me is the source/root of our personal hope – a hope that surpasses all understanding/springs eternal/we each wait/long for.

[Alexander Pope/poet 1733/34 poem “An Essay on Man”: “Hope springs eternal in the human breast.” HOPE/future: new each morning! (Lam 3:22-23)-based on experience/God’s promises/steadfast faithfulness.]

I have a theory about dogs: they live in the ever-present now, and because they do they live in ever-present hope! I think dogs are masters of hope: every moment is an extemporized moment of grace to be immediately appreciated. (*Milo: I'm not excluding you – I know that a cat's hope is that no matter what they've done wrong, they hope that it looks like the dog did it*) For dogs – and young children, hope is self-reinforcing: their hope makes them them (it's what makes us us!) – and, as such, to me, they offer a glimpse of the joy known to those whose hope is in God/Jesus.

I mention this because everything I've learned about grace/hope came from our children/dogs. Sure, I knew about grace/read the Bible/studied/even preached it – but it wasn't until I had children/dogs that I knowingly experienced grace. They both possess is the ability to express unreserved love/joy/hope – they let it all hang out. They express their love openly/unabashed/unrestrained ways – give their whole selves/body to it/you: they trusted completely (as they leap from the newel post!) in ways that I had never known/received before. That's grace: being loved/trusted, when you don't deserve it.

Philip Yancey/wrote 'grace'/the "last best word" in the English language – not spoiled/sullied by hypocrisy/cynicism by 'religion'/those who have rejected it: so is Hope. When you experience/find it, they stun/startle you: Grace sends us reeling/Hope leaves giddy. Both go beyond our understanding/undeserved gifts, they're not earned/only received that change everything/us/you/me.

Friends, we are to live in the ever-present/expectant, open anticipation of hope as those who have both experienced God's saving grace in/through the resurrection but also look forward to Jesus' return. This is not just a theoretical/theological hope – it is the personal hope/fulfilment of all of God's promises to be-with/protect/provide/carry/save us. As we live by faith/in hope the more we realize that the God we believe in has always been actively/intentionally with/loving/caring for us. and what this means is that, no matter who you are/what you've done/how bad things are/far down/broken/battered/ashamed we might be, Jesus will call/come to/save you/me/us: this is God's promise; it is our personal hope. Amen.