

Trinity UMC May 29, 2022

Resurrection Shaped Life: Hope

Rev. Geri Hamlen Ascension of the Lord Sunday

Prayer of the Day

Christ of the cross and empty tomb, your resurrection is the source of our hope.
The miracle that led you beyond death is the inspiration for our lives.
We seek the new life that you offer us.
May our thoughts, words, deeds truly reflect the shape of
our hope, our courage, our loyalty and our attention. Amen.



Proclamation of the Word

‘Resurrection Shaped Life: Hope’ Acts 1: 1 – 13, 1 Kings 19: 1 - 9
Ascension Sunday is a swinging door in the Church year. We are moving out of the cycle of Advent, Lent, Easter into the Season of the Holy Spirit. We are moving away from a deep dive into the life and activities of Jesus as one who walks among us and we are preparing to move our attention to Christ’s gift of the Holy Spirit who offers us power to live as Resurrection shaped people and to witness to the power of God through Jesus Christ. So here we are, considering one more time the Resurrection Shaped life that is offered to us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

It was several months ago that I put together the sermon topics for this Easter Season. The Resurrection Shaped life seemed like a good theme for such a time as this when there is so much going on. Then and now.

The challenges of pandemic have become pretty established and aren’t likely to ever go away, as we once hoped.

Our American political landscape continues to be a strange mixture of questionable facts and misinformation.

Civil discourse is overshadowed by name-calling, rumor, and conspiracy theories.

Public protests have died down but seem to be just simmering below the surface—we used to say in the Chicago area: Summer is coming and things will heat up.

The predictions of ecological disaster get more and more grim all the time.

Supreme Court and State legislatures making controversial and questionable decisions.

War in Ukraine...

The list goes on and on.

How on earth do we function in the middle of all this mess and more as the followers of Jesus, shaped by the miracle of Resurrection?

My hope in preaching these last 7 weeks has been that it will prove useful for each of us to put to use:

Courage—a gift from God and
Paying attention—looking for God in the midst of the mess
Loyalty—to Jesus’s teachings about forgiveness and love for neighbor and even enemies
Character and Wisdom—Listening hearts, discerning minds, awareness that God can make something good come out of even the worst situations.

I couldn’t possibly have known that the final topic of Hope, for this last Sunday of the series would come during a week or 10 days when so many Americans, including elders in a Buffalo grocery store and children in a Texas school were killed by 18 year old young men. My heart is just breaking for everyone involved. I imagine many of you have heard so much about this that I will quote just one statistic: Firearm deaths are the leading cause of death for children and adolescents, age 1 – 19 in this county. I confirmed that info in several reputable places including U of M researchers as recently as April this year in an article where they analyzed CDC mortality statistics.

Let’s not get caught up in information analysis this a.m.
Instead, let’s ask the questions that need to be asked. The questions that are at the forefront for many people, maybe especially those like us here who follow Jesus. Questions like:

1. Why does God allow this slaughter of the innocents to happen?
2. How can anything good come out of this particular horror show?
3. Where is God for those little one and their families and their teachers?
And maybe the most important question of all:
4. Do we really dare to hope for better days ahead based on all the circumstances that we see going on all around us? And the colossal failure up to now for meaningful and effective action to protect our children?
Where’s the hope in all of that?

Yes, those are all appropriate questions to ask at this time. And I only wish that we could retreat for a day or a week-end even to give each of those questions the attention they deserve. But it’s Memorial Day week-end, right? I’m sure that many of you have plans and friends and family to spend time with so let’s zero in on the Question of Hope. Do we dare to hope for better days ahead in spite of all the brutal, cruel and destructive events of our time?

And of course, the answer is yes...absolutely yest to hope....even though Hope seems like a pretty pale and flighty message under these circumstances. These gun deaths just keep happening...so many. So often. How can we NOT feel like Elijah sitting under that broom tree, worn out and ready to give up? But hear God’s good news: The flame of hope can die down to an ember.

It can be reduced to a pile of ashes even...but in God's human creation, in each of us, there is always room for hope to rise again and again and again, if we let it.

Let's remember that the disciples of Jesus, not just the 12 but also the women who made Jesus' ministry possible, they felt pretty hopeless themselves. The betrayal and arrest and crucifixion of Jesus are a reminder to us of the horrible circumstance under the Roman Empire at that time. Did I ever tell you about the time maybe a century before Jesus was born when more than 5000 people were all crucified at the same time in Jerusalem? Because they dared to defy the powers and the authorities of their culture and government at the time. Then and now, there are a lot of forces hard at work to stamp out hope. To scare the hope right out of us.

We don't have to let that happen. I saved this quote from The Very Rev. Randolph Marshall Hollerith, Dean of Washington Nat'l Cathedral Spring 2021 'Cathedral Insider'

Easter is our great annual reminder that we do not have to create our own hope. It comes to us from God, and just at the moment when hope seems lost and dead, it springs up into new life. Hope isn't something we make. It's something we're given, and all we have to do is accept it. A gift from God.

The Very Rev. Randolph Marshall Hollerith, Dean of Washington Nat'l Cathedral Spring 2021 'Cathedral Insider'

The disciples, for all they had experienced, you can hear the hope in their question to Jesus: Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" They were hoping for a political solution and yes, this week, I confess that I am to.

You've maybe heard the saying: Be careful what you wish for?

I say, Be careful what you hope for.

I am in fact hoping that the elected politicians in our country will actually and finally do what I hear that 90% of the American public wants in terms of banning assault rifles in order to keep our children safe. However, I find little nourishment for that hope in the Scriptures.

What I do find is that it is Better to be wise and discerning about aligning our hopes with the promises that Jesus makes to us rather than leaning on our own personal wishes. Because:

Jesus replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus didn't promise that the kingdom of Israel will be restored—politically and empirically. No...

He said that the Kingdom of God is here and now with us always.

He said...I have something even better for you.

Jesus is saying that we can expect...not just hope, but expect...to receive power from the Holy Spirit to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they take. Sound familiar? That's one of the Baptismal questions that is asked of those who commit to following Jesus: Do you hope, do you expect AND: Do you accept the freedom and the power that God offers you?

Have you prepared your heart and your mind and is your spirit open to receiving the power God wants you to have to get through these dark days?

That's the hope I have for each of you. Because it may not get better for us in this country before it gets worse and I want you to be ready as Resurrection shaped people.

Ready with courage.

Ready with loyalty to God's ability to be present even in these dark days.

Ready with character and wisdom to see that there are better days ahead.

Ready with hope even when the dark days go on and on for a long, long time.

God knows that we humans have a huge capacity for making each other miserable in so many horrible and myriad of ways. But God doesn't abandon us for all of that. Even the tiniest flame of hope in the darkest hours is possible. It may not be angels bringing us food and water like they did for Elijah. It may not be a political miracle of cooperation in our time and place, but hope is alive because God is with us.

Hope is an inspiration that we can see in Scripture, in history, in how the human spirit survives, heals and goes on to live from scars instead of from bleeding wounds.

Hope happens when we set aside desperation and trust that better days will come around eventually.

An editor put together some essays in a book entitled, 'The Impossible Will Take a Little While: A Citizen's Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear' back in 2004. What did we have going on back then that comes even close to what we deal with today?

Moot point but I culled this quote:

Another world is not only possible, she's on her way. Maybe many of us won't be here to greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen carefully, I can hear her breathing.

Arundhati Roy 'Come September' in *The Impossible will Take a Little While: A Citizen's Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear*, ed. Paul Rogat Loeb (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2004) 239 – 240, 106 – 107

We who follow Jesus are reminded each year on this Ascension Sunday that the impossible has already been made possible. God so loved the world that living with us in the person of Jesus really happened. That's the impossible made real for all time. And with a quieter heart, we can hear that message.

Jesus died from the intense and immense cruelty of human weakness and betrayal and from the over-powering oppression of human government and was resurrected,

came back to life, continues to love and forgive and offer peace to us, whether we deserve it or not. That's the abstraction of redemption made concrete in the past, the present and the future. With a quieter mind, we can hear the stirring of hope.

And Jesus promised to be with us always. And Jesus promised to send power through the Holy Spirit to us even as his time in person on this earth passed away. That's the seed of hope here and now, planted and nourished in our faith and litany that tells us: Christ has died Christ is Risen Christ will come again.

Another and better world is not only possible and on her way...it's here and now when we sing, nearer my God to thee, and when we pray, sweet hour of prayer, to live from a place of hope rather than fear and desperation.

Prior to Anselm, The Sixth Lamentation Wm. Brodrick, p. 370 - 371 Penguin Books, 2003
'Those tears (in my soul) are part of what it is to be a monk. **Out there, in the world, it can be very cold. It seems to be about luck, good and bad, and the distribution is absurd. We have to be candles, burning between hope and despair, faith and doubt, life and death, all the opposites. That is the disquieting place where people must always find us. And if our life means anything, if what we are goes beyond the monastery walls and does some good, it is that somehow, by being here, at peace, we help the world cope with what it cannot understand...**'

We may not understand this hurtful world but Jesus says...Peace be with you. Let us Live as those who accept the gift of hope as we remember always the love and the strength of Jesus who shows us what it looks like to go through the worst and come out the other side. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer

God of hope,

you call us to live in hope.

To trust that human justice will more closely align with your divine purposes.

To affirm that the healing of the world is possible and that there is joy in sharing and caring for others, friends, neighbors, strangers and even those with whom we disagree.

Even as our hearts break again for the children, for the families, for the teachers, for those who didn't know what to do, for those who watched helpless and hurt and angry...help us to remember that tiniest little spark of hope for a better future. A spark that might some day and sooner than later grow to be a flame shining in the dark so as to light the way to your love, your peace, your power through your Holy Spirit. Amen.