

Devotion: Tuesday, April 14, 2020

Romans 5: Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Virginia was 19 years old and pregnant when she went to live with her 15th set of foster parents. Her case file read like a textbook example of neglect, abuse and bureaucratic failure. She sat silently in a chair, hands neatly clasped, staring into her lap. The foster parents, whose three children were in school, had been briefed about Virginia's story and promised that this placement would be "temporary." (Temporary was the story of Virginia's life.)

Finally, the foster mother said, "Are you frightened, Virginia?"
"Kinda," she replied without looking up. Then, "I've been in lots of homes."
"Well," the sympathetic woman tried to reassure the young mother-to-be, "Let's hope this time turns out for the best."
Virginia's reply is one of those statements that sticks to your soul — it was flat, without change of tone and without Virginia even looking up — "Hurts too much to hope."

Can you imagine?

After 5 weeks in distancing and isolation, is hope becoming scarce?

Hope for all this to end, slowing fading at each news report.

Hope of a "normal" life by May, or Memorial Day, or 2025?

Hope that my kids will be back to school.

Hope that no one I know gets sick.

How long can hope last?

Whenever I am in a real mess of pain, or I am in some kind of emotional suffering, and some well-meaning friends will say, "Well, when God closes a door, he opens a window," I start immediately looking around for that open window so I can push them out of it. Which is to say, I don't find ignoring the difficult reality of our lives in favor of some kind of blindly cheerful optimism to be hopeful; I find it to be delusional....but that's me.

So, yes, it feels like hope can be risky and connecting hope to suffering can be a stretch.

But maybe what Paul said was right. The way that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope is that suffering, endurance and character actually free us from the burden of having to be naively optimistic about the events before us. Maybe if hope isn't a very reliable starting point, then hope is not something we should have to work at. Maybe real hope is always something we are surprised by. This week I started to think of hope as that which is left after all else has failed us. And that is an Easter hope.

That is the surprising hope that a risen Jesus gives.

That's the hope the women were surprised by at the empty grave.

The words "Do not be afraid." "He is not here." And "He has gone ahead of you."

These words tell me that no matter what we go through, even death, the ultimate failure, Jesus is there ahead of us.

And when we all get through this "thing", Jesus will be there ahead of us too, loving, caring and showing us where we go next.

Let us pray:

Lord of resurrection surprises, open our hearts this day to the presence of Jesus Christ. Erase our excuses for unbelief, and exchange them for strong witness to the power of your mercy and love. Give us courage and challenge us to walk the path of discipleship, knowing that Jesus goes before us, leading and guiding our steps. In his name, we pray. Amen.

Thanks to all of you who joined our Easter service on-line. It looks like we had over 47 signed in, and if you count all those who were watching with loved ones and family, our virtual attendance was around 100 worshippers.

God is Good!

God bless you all! Stay Safe

Pastor Jack