

Worship Resources

Easter 6 Sunday, Year C,

Sermon by Rev. Glenn A Brumbaugh

26th May, 2019

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5 NRSV / John 14:23-29 NSRV

SLIDE

This morning, are you hopeful or hopeless?

A relatively recent study by Princeton University

found that hopelessness has been on the rise for some time.

According to the study, which looked at the years from 1999 to 2013,

the death rate for middle-aged Americans,

after declining by an average of 2% per year for decades,

rose by 7% for that population

in the recent years included in the study.

This increase was not observed in the normal causes for death in this population

such as heart disease, cancer, etc.,

but in diseases

directly attributed to increased stress and hopelessness:

suicide,

and maladies related

to increased drug and alcohol consumption.

So my question is pretty valid.

Hopelessness is statistically on the rise,

and has increased dramatically among certain populations since 2016.

The study from Princeton identified that populations
that had less income security, a weak social safety net,
and less access to healthcare
had higher levels of hopelessness
versus populations that had more stability.

Which seems logical to me.

When the times get tough,
and you don't feel you have many options to make it,
naturally, you tend to feel hopeless.

So you may be thinking, why is the pastor trying to bring us down

On what is predicted to be the first nice sunny day of our holiday
weekend?

Well, I'm trying to show that our circumstances
aren't that different from the early church in our scriptures this morning.

In Revelation, we have John of Patmos,

who has been exiled there in pretty meager circumstances,

writing to the young churches of Asia Minor

who were struggling with persecution,

not only by the Roman authorities,

but their Jewish neighbors as well.

In our gospel text, Jesus is giving his farewell discourse to the disciples,

knowing things are not going to be easy for them

when he is physically gone,
and is trying to give them the hope they need
in the dark times to come.

SLIDE

We often look at scripture and think of it as being remote from our circumstances,
and may feel that it's not relevant to our situation.

But these were people living in challenging times as well,
under oppressive regimes
that just seemed to get more and more radical and ineffective every day.

They too struggled to make ends meet,
and worried about how they were going to make it.

They too thought it just can't get much worse,
Jesus must surely be coming back soon.

But he didn't, and he hasn't.

But is that our only hope?

Is that the only solution to the problems that plague our world?

Well, as time marched on, that Jesus movement gradually shifted its focus

from Jesus' imminent return,
to the hope if found in the visions that John of Patmos provided:
visions of final divine justice, of a new heaven and new earth,
and a new Jerusalem descending from the heavens.

Hope was found at the end of one's journey, in a better, blessed hereafter,
not in the misery of the here and now.

In fact, I would even go so far as to say that became the main selling point for this new religion over time.

“Join the club and get a ticket to heaven!”

And certainly scripture supports the promise of eternal life.

But is that what Jesus is getting at in our gospel reading today?

His focus seems to be on the here and now for his followers.

He talks of himself and the Father making their home with those who love them.

He talks of sending the Advocate to dwell with those that believe,

to remind them of his teaching, and to guide them in this life,

here and now.

His message is focused in the now, not some distant future.

He offers hope in that future, but not at the expense of hope here and now.

But it is hope that he offers.

In a world where it can be very easy to become hopeless,

Jesus is offering his peace, a peace that is not like the world has to offer.

Throughout the gospels,

Jesus is constantly contrasting the kin-dom of God, the kin-dom of Heaven,

with the world around us.

But they aren't mutually exclusive entities.

He speaks of the kin-dom breaking in, of the kin-dom drawing near.

The Advocate comes to help us look around us with kin-dom eyes,
not the eyes of the world.

Jesus knows how easily it can be
to get pulled into the hopelessness that the world offers,
to be limited with worldly goals and expectations.

SLIDE

In the movie that we watched a clip from earlier, *The Shawshank Redemption*,
an old prisoner, Brooks Handlin,
acts unreasonable and threatens to take another prisoner's life.
They find out that the reason Brooks has reacted this way
is that he's scared.

Scared because his parole has been approved.

You see those outside of Shawshank see it as a prison,
but Brooks sees as home.

Later, in the prison yard "Red"

explains why Brooks acts the way he does.

"Brooks is just.. institutionalized. The man's been in here 50 years -
50 years! This is all he knows. You know what I'm trying to say?
I'm telling you, these walls are funny.

First, you hate them, then you get used to them.

Enough time passes, you get to depend on them."

That's institutionalized."

I think that is the problem for some of us. We've become institutionalized..To this world.

We don't look through kin-dom eyes to see kin-dom possibilities.

We focus our attention on these earthly walls, only what we can touch,

feel, observe. And it's true..

These earthly walls are funny that way... First we hate them..

What baby doesn't cry when he leaves the safety of his mother's womb?

But then we do get used to them,

enough time passes and we begin to depend on them.

When God is over and over again

trying to teach us not to be so narrow in our vision.

He's saying, "Look, true success is not measured in where you are,

it's in where you could be, it's what you could be.

True success is not about how comfortable you are here,

it's about how open you are to pursue the kin-dom

breaking into the here and now.

But God's offer is not what the world has to offer

and God's call is not to lead a respectable worldly life.

It's to lead a kin-dom life, one based on God's values, not Caesar's.

Likewise, John of Patmos gives us a vision of a different possibility.

We often think of the grand imagery of Revelation as only what is to come,

as a road map for our future.

But what if that image of New Jerusalem

was an image of what the church is meant to be?

What if that grand city where God is present among God's people,

so much so that the light of God

makes lamps, the sun, and the moon unnecessary,

is the community of the faithful, the body of Christ?

That would have a profound effect on our perception wouldn't it?

Seeing our life together as being the New Jerusalem, the new city,
the world the way it's supposed to be, God's kin-dom among humankind.
Not some perfect abode in the next life,
but the possibility of heaven here on earth, as the body of Christ.

How would we act differently if we saw Revelation

Not as some timeline for a future apocalypse,
but hope for the church in the here and now?

Because that is the underlying message, not only of Revelation,
but Jesus's message in John.

There is reason to hope. We are never alone in this.

The Spirit is sent to us, and resides with us, to guide and strengthen,
to remind us of what path Jesus taught
and continues to lead us down today, if we are willing to follow.

Jesus tells us, "My peace I give to you, which is not as the world gives.

Do not be troubled."

How can we, as the New Jerusalem on earth be a model of that peace and comfort?

How can God's light shine through us into the darkness around us,
a beacon drawing people into this space where they can find peace and safety?

SLIDE

Towards the end of *The Shawshank Redemption*,

Red and Andy are sitting musing on what they would do if they got out.

Andy, who never allowed himself to lose hope,
and refused to conform to being an inmate,
dreams of opening a hotel
and operating a fishing boat in an idyllic Mexican resort town.
Red cautions him not to cling to “pipe dreams,” that they have no hope,
that they need to accept their fate in this world
and the hopelessness it brings, become institutionalized.

Andy refuses to accept that,
and closes the conversation by saying we all have a choice,
“To get busy living, or get busy dying.”

My prayer this morning is that we get busy living, living the spirit-filled kin-dom life,
seeking the leading of the Spirit together,
to find what God is leading us as God’s own city on a hill,
how we can be so full of God light that we don’t need lamps to light our way.

Because the alternative is to get busy dying
in a worldly life that will always be short on hope. May we choose life. Amen.