

So are you feeling hopeful or hopeless this morning?

I'm sure we could argue for both sides of that perspective in the day and age in which we live.

A little later we will honor the recent achievements of the graduates among us
who have reached a milestone in their lives,
and are embarking on the next chapter of their lives,
which can offer hope not only to their personal journeys,
but for the rest of us in the impact they may make in their own ways
in the world we all share.

Today is also Father's Day, in which we honor the fathers among us,
and the potentially positive contribution father figures have made in our lives,
as well as the positive influence young fathers may yet make.

It's a beautiful sunny day in which we start our summer schedule,
and we have the hope that if the pastor's not long-winded,
we'll be able to get out and enjoy most of this gorgeous summer day.

But, as I said, there is also plenty of reasons to feel hopeless as well.

Those same things that give some of us hope, can make others feel hopeless.

Recent graduates can feel overwhelmed with the worries
of moving into living an adult life:
how they will pay for school and getting everything set up for that,
getting a job, finding a place to live,
and all the other adult responsibilities that play a role in many of us getting
different shades of hair over the course of our lives.

Father's Day can also be bittersweet for many
who were not given the opportunity to have children of their own,
or whose father's may not have been the positive influence others experienced.

Even our ongoing sunny weather

can be a reminder of the lack of rain

that is sending us into summer in a drought condition.

Hope can be elusive.

But our scriptures this morning are all about finding hope.

Jesus is spending his last quality time with his disciples.

Right now they are all pumped up on a “hope high.”

But Jesus knows it's all about to come crashing down.

Soon they will be pariahs among their own people.

The same folks who yelled “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday

will be looking to hunt them all down a week later.

Their fate will soon be one of locking themselves away and hiding,

or fleeing back to the anonymity of a fisherman's life in Galilee.

Hope would very soon be a fleeting notion.

They would find themselves largely alone in a hostile world.

A world with Pharisees arguing with Sadducees and Priests,

all claiming that theirs was the right viewpoint,

and that the others were heretics,

who all were vying for power and influence

with the king as well as the Romans,

who were pitting everybody else against each other.

There were layers upon layers of hate and stereotyping going around.

And they were the current scapegoats,

the common enemy everyone in power could coalesce around.

Sounds pretty familiar, doesn't it.

Don't we still do the same thing?

Whether it's the immigrants from Central and South America,

the LGBTQ community, the Muslim world,

the powers that be still use scapegoats

to gain our support and loyalty.

So what hope does Jesus offer to his followers

who will soon find themselves feeling lost and hopeless in a hostile world?

A companion who would ensure they would never truly be lost and never alone.

A guide to help them through the decisions and choices in life.

A teacher to reveal to them the true meaning of the greatest commandment,

to love the Lord your God with all your body, soul, and mind,

and to love your neighbor as yourself.

He knew the hope that relationship would provide to his followers,

not just the initial group, but the generations to follow.

He knew the difficulty of living a life

that is contrary to the divisiveness and distrust

which is often the norm in the world.

It is only through right relationship that we move

beyond the negativity of the world

and move towards a kin-dom life.

As he and God work in tandem,

so we are supported by the Spirit, and support each other.

The hope Jesus gives is a different way of living,

one that doesn't rely on a life by the world's standards

based on competition and greed,

but one based on relationship and love for the Divine, and for each other.

But what does the leading of the Spirit look like?

How does one experience it?

Well, first and foremost, one needs to be quiet to hear the Spirit's leading.

Each of us has our own experience

but we need to have times of silent prayer and meditation.

We're so programmed to approach prayer from a petition perspective,

where we rattle off our list of requests and/or gritudes

that end up doing all the talking, say amen, and move on.

How often do we spend time just listening?

There's a reason each week

that we take a moment to "quiet our hearts" before prayer.

So we are open to the Spirit,

to that still small voice we all feel in some way,

that urge to do the right thing

when we are tempted to do something that is not of love,

that nudge to move our life in a different direction

than we had planned.

To seek the Spirit in community,

we intentionally make prayer an integral part to our processes

in how we make decisions as a body.

As a teacher, the Spirit needs something to work with, groundwork to give clarity to.

Through studying scripture, we gain that groundwork

along with plenty of questions, believe me as former seminary student,

the more you study, the bigger the questions.

We seek the teaching Spirit's guidance with through prayer,
individually and collectively.

There's a story of A group of Christians gathered in a church auditorium
for an evening Bible Study.

Some were talking while waiting for the study to begin.

One man began to share with the leader
about a church breakfast he'd attended.

A well known Bible scholar had been invited to speak at the breakfast.

During the course of his remarks the scholar stated
that he had recently gained new insight
into a verse of Scripture that had puzzled him for years.

"When I heard this," the man said to the Bible Study leader, "I thought to myself,
'If this scholar who has written commentaries and books
and who has studied the Bible for years
is just now understanding a verse of Scripture,
how can I, an ordinary church member, understand the truth?'"

"You know," replied the leader, "
rather than being discouraged by the scholar's remarks, I'm encouraged.
It just goes to show that understanding God's truth
doesn't depend on our intellectual ability
or number of theological degrees earned.

Rather, God's truth is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

Finally when we join together in worship,
we provide a mechanism for the Spirit to guide us together,
to be present and move us in ways we may not experience on our own.

We are motivated together to be and act as God in the world around us.

N T Wright, the famous New Testament scholar

talks about the task of Christians in the world.

He says, "Many say,

'Oh yes, the Holy Spirit came in his place to live in us.'

Yes, but for what purpose?

The Holy Spirit came to empower us to be God's life in the world.

We are to do the work of God in the world.

We are to be God to the world. And we cannot do that alone.

The church is God's redemptive community in the world.

Without you, and without you joined with God's other children,

God's work will not be done. God will not do it without us.

God will not do it for us."

So will we seek the Spirit at work among us, leading us, teaching us,

seeking to be in relationship with us?

Will we make space to hear and discern the Spirit's leading,

to quiet the noise of our hearts and minds and actually listen?

That is where we find hope in this world, in relationship with God and Christ through the Spirit,

led by the Spirit in relationship with each other,

leading us in love and welcome to those outside those doors.

How do we reach them?

Through seeking the Spirit's guidance together, and taking seriously the path we are led to,

regardless of how different or difficult it may be.

May we find hope together. Amen.