

Having Hope ~ November 9, 2003

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13; Psalm 78:1-7

“Hope is a belief in a positive outcome related to events and circumstances in one's life. Hope is the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best.”

“ When used in a religious context, hope carries a connotation of being *aware* of spiritual truth.” (Wikipedia) Much was made of hope in the recent presidential election, on both sides. Hope in the future and hope in the government's ability to turn things around, but, most of all, hope in ourselves as a nation of people who desire to pull together to make the world better for all. In this desire, we are not very different from other people at other times that moved forward in hope.

Henri Nouwen wrote: “All the great spiritual leaders in history were people of hope. Abraham, Moses, Ruth, Mary, Jesus, Rumi, Gandhi, and Dorothy Day all lived with a promise in their hearts that guided them toward the future without the need to know exactly what it would look like. Let's live with hope.”

The nation Israel often grumbled and complained about life as it followed Moses through the desert years of the Exodus and when it continued to follow Joshua after Moses' death. Often the people wanted to return to Egypt and the comfort they remembered there, in spite of being people who were slaves to the Egyptian government. They could not see the hope shining in the heart and mind of Moses as he sought to free his people and lead them to the Promised Land. They could not see the hope that Joshua held for them until he finally said to them, in effect, “Now, look here, you must make a decision, either choose to follow the God who has brought you this far or go back to those old gods you held so dear in your former life. I don't know who you will choose to serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua gave them an ultimatum, and our story tells us, the people chose the way of hope in a better future and in the one God they had chosen to worship.

Hope carries us forward through life when it seems that all else fails us. Living life can be a lonely business and we become desperate people when we lose touch with the fact that things can and will be better.

A woman named Dorothy Thompson penned these words, “Courage, it would seem, is nothing less than the power to overcome danger, misfortune, fear, injustice, while continuing to affirm inwardly that life with all its sorrows is good; that everything is meaningful even if in a sense beyond our understanding; and that there is always tomorrow.”

I try to recall these words when I have trouble believing that all will be well in the future. I struggle to remember that there is always tomorrow. When there are those times, very few and far between, when I feel things might be hopeless, I tell myself that I will live through the present day and sleep through the coming night and that the next day will

dawn and I will find a way to work through problems that often seem insurmountable and overwhelming. I have learned that those few times when I fall into dark thoughts occur only because I allow myself to be led there by others who have a negative outlook on life. I need to remember that those others have their own roads to walk and that there are times when they cannot see the goodness of life that is all around them as they move forward in darkness, carrying gloomy thoughts with them. I need to remind myself that the journeys others are on are not my journey—one that I prefer to be a sojourn of hope and promise and faith. I always must recall that “When the world says, give up, hope whispers, try it again.” (Anon.)

I prefer to be one of those women who has oil set aside for my lamp so that I will be ready when the darkness falls and something or someone comes along that will help me walk into the light and stay there. I like to dwell in optimism and to understand that all will be better for me if I choose to have it be so. I like to feel that “all will be well, things will work out.” Many of you know this, I say it often. No matter what the turmoil may be that surrounds us, it seems that if we have a calm center of our beings to which we can retreat and in which we can regroup, we can handle anything.

This is a major theme in the pages of our Bible. It stretches through the Hebrew Scriptures and finds itself a home in the pages of our New Testament. What is there to live for, those who founded our religion ask, if there is no hope? People become terribly unhappy when they live lives without it. Allan Chalmers said, “The Grand essentials of happiness are: something to do, someone to love, and something to hope for.” Can we wish for anything more?

Jesus told us this in other ways and using other words. He always reminded us that there is a force that exists that is far greater than us and our world and time bound fears and anxieties. He told us that there are sublime times when we are touched by a sense that we are not alone and that we are watched over and that even the hairs on our heads are numbered. While he did not walk around singing, “Don’t Worry, be Happy,” he told us that we can never extend our lives or grow an inch taller or find more money by worrying about it. Instead we are to keep the faith and hold on to the hope that our faith should bring us.

In our present uncertain times, we need to step back and catch our breath for a moment of two and reflect on all the ways we are truly blessed as individuals and as a community of faith. We need to look around and see where it is light shines showing us the way to fuller lives. We are not called to sit in gloom and darkness and bemoan our fate as if we had no hope. We are to hear the ring of spiritual truth in the teachings we hold so dear, integrate the positives in life that are all around us, join hands together and walk forward “in hope that sends a shining ray far down the future’s broadening way.” When we do this, all things fall into the proper perspective and we can see our way clear and brightly lighted as we move toward the establishment of God’s kingdom among us.

--Amen