

The Thrill of Hope

December 18, 2016

Our song just ended with the words, “Worship Christ, the newborn King!” There is a thrill of hope in each person who understands that Jesus is the King of ALL kings. And He alone is worthy of our worship. It is a thrill of hope to know and worship Jesus Christ! But there are times in all of our lives when it’s difficult to worship. Sometimes we can’t see hope, we can’t feel it, we just can’t seem to grasp on to it. And so, hope does not thrill our souls the way it ought to or perhaps the way it used to or the way it seems to for other people. There are times in life when it’s difficult to hold on to hope.

For some of us, we can think back to a time in our past when we were losing hope and we felt deep despair and we wondered how we would ever make it through. But somehow, by God’s grace we did make it through. For others, we are losing hope right now, even today. We are struggling on this very morning to hang on. The circumstances of life in the real world are pulling us down into a muddy pit. And our hope seems to be dangling by a thread. For still others, we understand there are no guarantees for our future even if things have been going pretty well lately. We know that there may very well be something waiting down the road in 2017, around the next bend, that could cause us to struggle to maintain a hopeful outlook. Life could change quickly.

Certain events in the world around us make things seem hopeless at times. The war and Syrian refugee crisis in Aleppo is incredibly discouraging. Human trafficking continues to be an unimaginable evil in our world, around the globe and locally. Acts of violence and murder, school shootings, and the like continue to pop up on the radar all over our nation. Hope begins to feel very, VERY far away.

In our personal lives, this world can cause us to grow weary through relationship struggles, financial struggles, challenges at school or work, or health problems for us or someone we love. Any number of life circumstances can pile up and create a weariness in each one of us. And it’s not just physical weariness. But rather the kind of weariness that can’t be remedied by a good night’s sleep or an extra energy drink. It’s a weariness that saps our energy, our joy, and ultimately, our hope. It’s a weariness in our souls.

If this is how you are feeling this morning, I bring good tidings of great hope today. In Mt. 11:28-30 Jesus offers us these words of hope and comfort: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Beginning at that very first Christmas, Jesus came to this earth, humbly and gently, as an infant in a manger, to offer us rest for our souls and genuine, lasting hope for our lives. Hope that overcomes any situation in life. It’s been said, “There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them.”¹ One of the songs our choir will sing this morning is, “O Holy Night.” One line from this song talks about, “a thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices.” There is reason for hope in our modern day world. There is reason to rejoice!

Let me give you just two examples. Just last week, I received a ministry update from an old friend of mine named Dustin Kelm. He and his wife Katie have a global unicycling ministry. They travel all over the world and he performs amazing stunts on his unicycle. And they also share the Good News about the hope that is found in Jesus. This past year they traveled to places like Kenya, Albania, Egypt, and even Turkey. Yes, that’s right, Turkey. Turkey sits right next to Syria. This is where many

¹ Clare Boothe Luce (Wikipedia lists her as an American author, politician, U.S. Ambassador who is best known for her 1936 hit play *The Women*, which had an all-female cast. She is the wife of Henry Luce who publisher of *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune*, and *Sports Illustrated*.)

of the refugees are fleeing. This is also where many incredible ministries and relief efforts are setting up; many of them in Jesus' name.

Dustin writes: "Our tour was one month after the coup attempt but we still presented the Gospel openly to thousands who were very receptive. The few who caused disturbances by acting harshly made others even more curious about our message, giving us new opportunities to tell the Good News." I love it! Hope is being offered in places that may SEEM hopeless to us.

Here is a 2nd example. One of our Global Partners, Kathy Austvold, is bringing hope in Jesus name to India. She serves in a place where poverty and human trafficking are running rampant. Just this week, I received an email from her. She writes: Did you know when children have hope, wonderful things happen! ...When children have hope their parents also have hope... Outside of Kolkata, close to the city dump, there is a village where hope is being given to entire families. Tumpa, a wife and mother, is attending sewing classes and learning skills that enable her to earn a small amount of money for her family. Her interest goes beyond acquiring sewing skills to also learning about Jesus as she gathers weekly with other women for prayer, worship and Bible study.

It was the result of the ministry to women that the GlobalFingerprints program was born in this very needy village. Tumpa's 9-year-old son, Dev, is one of 85 children who are sponsored through Global Fingerprints...Now the children's fees are paid so that they can attend school.... On Saturdays around 200 children and teens are attending Bible Clubs! Children receive nutritional snacks, have regular doctor checkups and also receive home visits from the children's workers. Life is very difficult for Tumpa and Dev, but they are finding the hope and love of Jesus.

Hope in Jesus is an awesome, powerful force in our world today! I shared 2 examples of hope that is found through Christ. Allow me to share just one more. It's sitting right here in front of me. It's the Christ-followers who are in this room or reading this transcript. Here is a picture of our bell tower that sits right outside the front of our church. It was dedicated to our church back in 1992 by Ivan/Esther Lauderbaugh and Ivan/Elaine Lauderbaugh. I wanted to open up the side door of our sanctuary to let the sound of the bell in this morning but I didn't think the people sitting in Section #1 would appreciate that. I'm also a little concerned it could damage the bell in the severe cold we are experiencing today. But our church has no shortage of bells! So, I asked Judy Emery to help me out. As she rings this large handbell, think about this: It seems to me that the point of a bell is to ring forth loud and clear. To send out a message. The bell outside our building is there to ring hope! And the idea of the cross on top is to point people in our community to not just any hope but the genuine hope that is found in Christ.



So may our church, the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji, not just be a place where we meet as a church. May this not just be a building on which we hang our bell. But may our message also ring forth from this place as we endeavor to BE the church in our community, for our community, and to our community and the world.

The purpose of that first Christmas was to bring hope physically into the world. There are many people in our Bemidji community who are now living, "without hope and without God."² May our hope in Christ compel us this Christmas, to be a grace community that shares the thrill of hope with others. May our witness ring out clearly in this advent season! May we share this hope with our friends and neighbors. And, with all our relatives over the Christmas holiday, even the ones we are kind of glad we only see once a year. They need to find hope in Jesus as well. "Christ's birth is still the ultimate

² See Eph. 2:12

hope for a broken world.”³ Our Cantata this morning is called “A Thrill of Hope.” Hope in Jesus is something thrilling indeed!

Praise God for His Gift of Love demonstrated in the birth of Jesus Christ. Praise Him for the lasting peace that He offers us through the death and resurrection of his son, Jesus. Let’s choose to keep singing songs of joy to Him from our hearts as we experience the thrill of hope in our encounters with Him. And may God help our witness to ring forth this Christmas season!

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on December 18, 2016 by Pastor Jerry Johnson.

³ *A Thrill of Hope*, arranged by Joel Raney, p. 31.