

The Power of Hope

Many years ago an S-4 submarine was rammed by another ship and quickly sank. The entire crew was trapped inside. Other ships rushed to the scene of disaster off the coast of Massachusetts. No one knows exactly what took place down in that sunken submarine but we can be sure that those young men clung bravely to life as the oxygen slowly gave out.

A diver placed his ear against the side of the vessel and listened. He heard a faint tapping. Inside that trapped prison—someone was tapping out a message in the dots and dashes of the Morse code. The young diver listened intensely as the message was slowly tapped out and great emotion swelled inside him. What was the message? IT WAS THE QUESTION OF THE AGES—“*Is there any hope?*”

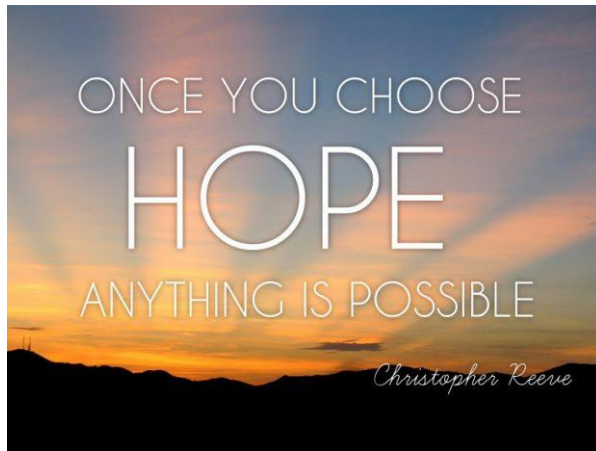
What do you think? Lots of people today are asking that question. Despite the preachers, and peddlers of simplistic positivism—despite the fact that many wait in childlike trust for brighter days—despite the optimism the Pop Psychology crowd would have us embrace—despite the common belief that America is *the greatest Nation on God's green earth*—despite the “pick yourself up by your own boot straps” mentality—there are countless people who've grown suspect of brighter days. They too ask the question of the ages, *IS THERE ANY HOPE?*

The question of hope is on our minds because we live in a world where for many hope seems temporarily dashed. Let's be honest, we often wonder when is the next shoe going to drop. In our personal lives, our families, and in society at large we deal with so much broken hope. It is not unusual for the things in which we willingly place out hope in to fail us. Yet at my deepest core I believe that because we are made in God's image, we are hardwired for hope. We historically put our hope in something. If you listen carefully, you will realize that we communicate with the language of hope all the time.

“I sure hope it doesn't rain today.”

“I hope she isn't mad at me.”

“I hope I can do what I promised.”



"I hope they win the world cup."

"I hope they can get along for once."

"I hope this sickness isn't something serious."

"I hope when I get home, there will be something to eat."

"I hope to make something worthwhile out of my life."

"I hope what I've believed in proves to be true."

"I hope my family and friends will be proud of me."

On our first Sunday of Advent we lit the Candle of Hope—yet for many hope in general is an evasive reality—and if we were completely candid we would allow ourselves to admit that some feel a dimness of hope—and a melancholy in their hearts even more keenly during this season. Even amidst all the bright lights and jingle bells, the Christmas music pumped into our heads since a week before Thanksgiving. Is there more hope or more hopelessness resonating in the hearts among us?

For many the question "*Is there any Hope?*," is not just a theoretical question—it is ***the question!*** We desperately need a HOPE THAT GIVES COPE! Alexander Pope once said: "*There is no medicine like hope, no incentive so great, and no tonic so powerful as expectations of something better tomorrow.*" As believers we often look to the *Good Book* for words of hope and encouragement amidst life's dilemmas and chaos.

Noah certainly longed for a sign of hope after the world had been destroyed by flood while he was held up floating with his family and the animal kingdom for months. Finally Noah released a dove through a hatch in the ark. Genesis 8:11, "*When the dove returned to Noah in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf!*" To Noah and his family this leaf was so much more than foliage; this was a promise of dry ground—vegetation—a new start. The

bird brought more than a piece of a tree; it brought hope. Isn't that what hope is? Hope is an olive branch—evidence of dry land after a terrible flood.

Don't we love the olive leaves of life? *"It appears the cancer may be in remission. A friend says."* *"I can help you with those finances...another says"* *"We will get through this together—a lover says to their partner"* *"Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall—all you have to do is call."* Words like that are hope infusing. And we love the parenthetical dove (messengers) that bring them. When a father walks his daughter through her first broken heart, he gives her an olive leaf. When a wife of many years consoles the wife of a few months, assuring her that no husband is perfect and storms pass, you know what she is doing? She is giving an olive leaf. When a dear friend put his strong hand on my shoulder and simply said *"You seem very pensive and distracted lately, when you are ready to talk about what's happening I am here for you."* His words were the olive leaf—he was the dove (messenger) that delivered it.

During this winter season as days are short and the weather has turned cold let us be present to the reality that despite all the holiday jingles and carols, many feel a lack of hope. One word of kindness, one thoughtful gesture, one random act of generosity may be an *"olive leaf"* bringing hope to a hurting heart. I believe the Christmas story at its core also reminds us that hope will never be found if we look purely on the horizontal, human level. We need a transcendent source of *"vertical hope."* I believe true hope must have a vertical focus. It is not enough to say that God gives hope, but that hope is attached to the glorious aspects of God's character. He is Holy, Just, Righteous, Sovereign, Loving, Wise, Forgiving, Immutable, Pure, Truthful, etc.

The more we explore and dwell upon these aspects of His character; the more engulfed in vertical awe we become; the more hopefulness and perspective we will have. **We simply can't stop hoping, because God created our lives to be propelled by hope.** Our capacity and desire for hope drives us instinctually to Him. And the more intentional and lofty our vertical focus becomes the more hope infused are the possibilities. *"Greater is He that in in you, than He that is in this world."* And he shall be called ***"Immanuel"*** which means God with us. Jesus Christ the giver of human hope. The prophecies from of old affirm *"Those walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness....and He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace..."* Isaiah 9:2,6. He told me to tell you.

He told me to tell you!

(Excerpt from Christmas Service)

Faithfully, Pastor Robert Zimmerman