

**Text:** Romans 5:1-5 (Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24)  
**Date:** January 17, 2010  
**Title:** "Living Hope"  
**Theme:** We practice living in hope by remembering God's goodness.

In need of hope this week – Haiti – people LIVING on hope  
Those surviving under rubble  
Those digging to get to them

This week's topic – *living* hope

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a **new birth into a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

Last week: finding hope / hope as an objective reality – not based on circumstances – God specializes in hopeless cases

This week: living hope / the practices of hope – how can we live lives in hope, how can we face daily difficulty with hope?

A little of this last week: honoring despair, being able to vent to God

So this week's message starts with the scripture from Romans 5:

2b...we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,

4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

So we have:

Suffering > Endurance > Character > Hope

I have to admit in all the times I've read this scripture, that connection was not immediately clear

Maybe it's not immediately clear to you either

I get that suffering produces endurance (another word for endurance is patience, it gets translated that way sometimes)

Last night someone shared a favorite quote from their Mom: “Adversity is the best teacher of patience.”

I also get that patience/endurance produces character – the ability to hold fast in the face of adversity, to persevere through something difficult is certainly a part of sound character, part of integrity  
We all admire people who are unwilling to give up, despite the odds

But again, back to the chain of thoughts:  
suffering>endurance>character>hope  
But how does character produce hope?

So let’s talk about that a minute

I want you to take some time now and think about the most difficult thing you’ve ever had to do, or the most difficult thing that’s ever happened to you – fix it in your mind – remember how uncertain you felt, how fearful, how anxious

Now I know that might be painful to think about, to go back to that place

How did you deal with it? Did you know God then? Did you see God walking with you then? If you didn’t know God then, do you see now how God walked with you through it?

Let me ask you this question: do you ever go back and revisit that experience when a new situation comes up?

Do you ever say to yourself: “if I made it through \_\_\_\_\_, then I’ll make it through this too”?

If you don’t, you should

See, this is the connection between character and hope

Endurance > Character

Character Gk *dokime* – proving, trial, tried character

NAB “proven character”

This is the key – PROVEN character

We are drawing upon the memory of difficult times we’ve weathered

We are drawing upon a knowledge of what we’re made of

Better yet, what’s God’s made of

This brings us back to the idea of endurance/patience

Because not only do we grow more trusting of God, we actually become more like God, more like Christ

Suffering > Endurance

Endurance Gk *hupomone* – endurance, constancy, steadfastness

KJV *patience*

Aren't these qualities of God? 'Steadfast love' from Ps 42 last week

God is constant, always with us

So as awful as it is to say, suffering can make us more like God – it hurts to say that – but from this passage, it looks like the truth

When we draw upon our knowledge of what we're made of, and God's faithfulness in helping us in the past, this gives us hope for living right now – for facing whatever situation is in front of us

We're drawing on past experiences of God and God's faithfulness to get us through today

And this is important because remember – from last week – our hope is based on not on circumstances but on God

If we believe this, every trial becomes a place for us to grow

God's grace/love/hope is so powerful that even things that work against hope strengthen it – each trial we face successfully, not giving up, leads us into a deeper and deeper trust of God, of hope in God

When the scripture says 'hope does not disappoint us' it's because our hope is in God

Our hope is not based in circumstances, it's based on God and God's character

Living hope means calling that character to mind – all the time

That means part of the practice of hope, the living of hope, is praising God even when we don't feel like it – is forcing ourselves to remember God's goodness even when we can't see it

How else can you hold on to faith / hold on to hope in the face of a disaster like what happened in Haiti this week?

Look at Lamentations – traditionally, the words of the prophet Jeremiah Prophesying at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in 586 BC

Lamentations 3 (NRSV):

**1 I am one who has seen affliction under the rod of God's wrath;  
2 he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light;  
3 against me alone he turns his hand, again and again, all day long.  
4 He has made my flesh and my skin waste away, and broken my bones;  
5 he has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation;  
6 he has made me sit in darkness like the dead of long ago.**

...

**13 He shot into my vitals the arrows of his quiver;**

...

**21 But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:**

**22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end;**

**23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**

**24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."**

If we want to live in hope, we have to remember God's faithfulness – we tell our own stories and listen to the stories of others

This is a part of the inheritance of Christians from our roots in Judaism

Every year for millennia, Jews retell the story of the Passover – they remember the Exodus, how God brought them out of slavery in Egypt – this has been a sustaining reminder of God's particular love for Israel in the face of persecution and Holocaust

It's the birthday weekend of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – think about how this same story of liberation became an inspiration to the civil rights movement in this country

The idea of being free, of being equal, of ending the days of segregated lunch counters and segregated buses, became 'the promised land' – the place that God promised to give God's own people when they came out of slavery

And it was the memory of God's faithfulness in carrying out that promise that drove people on – and it drove Martin Luther King on – he invoked it even the night before he was killed – on April 3, 1968 in Memphis TN when he said this:

“Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long

life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

So I say it again, along with Paul:

“suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us!”

So live hope. Live hope by remembering who God is, and what God has brought you through to get you to this day. Amen.

By Joe Monahan, Succasunna UMC, Succasunna NJ

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<sup>1</sup> Read the whole speech at <http://www.afscme.org/about/1549.cfm>.