

Text: 1 Peter 3:8-17 / Psalm 71

Date: January 24, 2010

Title: "Sharing Hope"

Theme: Sharing hope is about encouraging, witnessing, and believing that with God we can make a difference.

Finding Hope

Talked about the need to acknowledge despair – that sometimes despair is unavoidable, even for Christians – but we don't have to stay there
Was about planting our hope in the right place: in God, in Jesus

Living Hope

Was about practicing hope

Rom 5: suffering>endurance>character>hope> hope does not disappoint

Revisiting times when God has pulled us through as inspiration for NOW

Praising the God of hope even when we don't feel like it – because God's character doesn't change, even though our circumstances do

This week, we talk about Sharing Hope

I have three simple thoughts on this topic this week

Encouragement

Sharing Hope is first and foremost about encouraging each other

"encourage each other and build up each other" – 1 Thess 5:11

This is one of the primary purposes of the church – the body of believers / the body of Christ

We are called to mutually support each other, pray for each other, offer aid and assistance

The answer to the question: what do I get if I join the church – it's *everything* and *nothing* both at once

Nothing = no special privileges, only servanthood in the name of Jesus

But when things go wrong, there's no place else you want to be – you want to be among people who will truly care

I had a conversation with someone this week that made me think about this
Maybe you've been on the receiving end of these words, for example,
when you are the bereaved and at the funeral home: "let me know if
you need anything"

We've all said it – some of us have even meant it

But it's also true that often we say it without really meaning it

The lie of "let me know if you need anything" hurts most if it's told within the
Christian community – because it undermines everything we stand for
This is the antithesis of today's message: instead of sharing hope, you're
robbing hope, stealing it

Now this is a two way street – the relationships are what you put into them
– you have to be open, honest about what's going on in your life so
people can have a sense of how to help

Sometimes all that's needed to share hope with someone is simply to be
there – "UMCOR: Be there. Be hope."

UMCOR = United Methodist Committee on Relief

(Learned last week that the Rev. Sam Dixon, UMCOR's leader, died in the
earthquake in Haiti – the UMC was in Haiti before the earthquake!)

You cannot be hope if you're not there. We can't let our fear get in the way
of sharing hope.

B/c when someone gets to a point of extreme weakness, they just don't
physically, emotionally, spiritually have anything left. Hopelessness.

The only thing you've got is what someone is willing to loan you by allowing
you to see / hear / experience God at work through them.

Encouragement: literally to make or give courage to someone

Now we can't let that be cheap – it can't just be words – and that's where
we have to back it up with actions – the action of simply being there,
of serving, of praying with someone, of really listening.

We need to remind each other of why we're here – of the larger purpose
we serve – especially in difficult times

We need to be reminded of the hope we have in Jesus Christ

That's point one: encouragement.

Witnessing

Sharing Hope is also about being a witness to God's grace in the midst of suffering / struggle

I imagine if you think about it you've known one or two people in your life who were witnesses in the midst of struggle

This happens in several ways: sometimes it's simply about your attitude, the way you handle yourself

A story about a pastor going into the hospital whose faith was failing: who showed no sense of peace, no sense of comfort – a parishioner called him on it! – that too can be a means of encouragement!

Pastors are people too, we need to borrow hope sometimes

But it demonstrates a principle that all Christians are held to on one level or another: many believe faith is just a crutch – well, to those skeptics, if it's not even a good crutch, then what possible good is it?

We are held to a higher standard as Christians, to have our suffering glorify God

v 18a – For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.

In 1 Peter, a connection between our suffering and Christ's suffering

Christ's suffering serves a purpose: in order to bring us to God

Have you ever considered that your suffering – and don't get me wrong, all will suffer – may perhaps bring someone to God?

v.15 Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

We have to be ready to explain how it is that we are able to keep our chins up – to witness to the fact that our hope is grounded not in our circumstances, but in God

Every week in this series, I've pointed out something as a hard lesson, and this is perhaps the hardest lesson this week – to consider that our suffering might have the purpose of glorifying God

Now I would never force that interpretation on you – each of us has to understand how that happens for ourselves – but I do believe that each of us has an opportunity at all times, even in the midst of suffering, to witness to our hope

Now that is especially true when we're talking about persecution – and the context of 1 Peter very clearly has persecution in mind – if you go home and read this short book you'll see what I mean

We have to remember that sometimes we suffer simply for trying to do what's right – for trying to serve God, to serve our neighbors, to witness to Christ's teachings in various ways

When we seek justice for those whom others mistreat, we may very well be mistreated too

When we offer our faith as justification: perhaps even more so (and perhaps even by our fellow Christians, which hurts the most)

The world is not always a hospitable place for Jesus' followers!

People will wonder: why do you keep speaking up about this? Why do you keep taking the risk of helping "those people?"

Be ready to give an accounting for the hope that is in you, the reason why you do what you do, the reason why you keep on going

This brings me to the third point

One Person Can Make a Difference

Sharing hope is about realizing that one person CAN make a difference

Well, I take that back – maybe one person *can't* make a difference

But certainly we believe that one person with God can!

It's easy to be overwhelmed by the scale of the problems the world faces

Now authorities say more than 200,000 are dead in Haiti, more than 3.5 million homeless

The numbers overwhelm our ability to comprehend, to think of solutions, to imagine the resources necessary to set things right

And yet the people of Haiti will continue on - the church there continues to witness to the victory God won in Jesus Christ

We continue to witness to the hope we have in God, we continue to work to bring forth the Kingdom

One person can't fix it all, but one person, with God's help, can accomplish something

The essential question here is: what have we hoped in?

Do we believe that our God is the God who created the whole world or not?
Do we believe that our God really has any power or not?

If we don't believe it, then fundamentally, everything we've been saying
over the past few weeks is flawed
I don't know why you even sat through it, honestly!

Sharing hope is about taking hold of the promises God has made to us
The promises, like the Bible says, of "justice rolling down like waters, and
righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24)

We are partners with God in sharing hope for the entire world: through our
witness and through our work

Encouragement, witness, and the belief that with God, we can make a
difference: this is what sharing hope is all about

Amen.

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