



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for August 28, 2022
“Making a Difference: Our Call to Offer Hope”
Speaker: Pastors Tom Grieb & Ashlee Adkins
Scripture: I Peter 3:13-16

A World Without Hope

Hope is at a premium these days. Let’s face it, it’s awfully easy to feel a bit hopeless. The list is long these days—economic woes, racial strife, political divisiveness, a persistent pandemic, the war in the Ukraine, climate calamities, the list goes on and on.

These things challenge us emotionally, relationally, and even spiritually. It is hard to see any light at the end of the tunnel. No wonder hopelessness abounds.

Hope for the Hopeless

William Shakespeare once wrote, *“The miserable have no medicine, but hope.”* People need hope. It is the very thing that will strengthen them to persevere.

We have come to know that our hope is in Jesus Christ. This good news trumps all the bad. In Christ, there is every reason to be hopeful. In him, there is hope for the hopeless, and it is ours to share.

When it comes to sharing it, though, we are way too tentative. There are all kinds of reasons for that.

- We don’t want to be intrusive.
- We don’t want to come off *“holier than thou.”*
- We may feel inadequate
- We are contented to let someone else do it.

Bill Hybels encourages us in his book, *Just Walk Across the Room* to do just that—to *“walk across the room.”* Hybels asserts that there are people all around us who need to hear the good news about Jesus, particularly those who are seemingly on the periphery of our lives.

Hybels tells the story of being in a large gathering when he noticed any number of people on the periphery of what was going on. He took it upon himself to cross the room. He engaged one of those people and eventually offered a word about Jesus and the hope he came to offer.

Paul encouraged Timothy to *“preach the Word, to be prepared in season and out of season; to correct, rebuke, and encourage.”* II Timothy 4:2

We are to do the same.

Peter offers much the same thought in our passage for today. Let’s hear that just now.

1 Peter 3:13-16

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

If Not Us, Then Who?

When it comes to offering hope the question comes to all of us, if not us, then who? It comes to us to be ready *"to give the reason for the hope"* that is in us. You and I play a pivotal role in sharing that good news.

Paul puts it this way in Romans 10:14-15, *"How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"* Romans 10:14-15

When it comes to offering hope, we have good news on our side, notwithstanding the strength of God to power us through. So, then what are you afraid of? *"If God is for us who can be against us?"* Romans 8:31

Do you believe that?

Peter writes, *"But in your hearts **revere Christ as Lord.**"*

Before we can offer hope, we first have to know where our hope comes from. So where does our hope come from?

Ok, so you did pay attention last week. First we must have accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior, pick up our crosses and follow him. We first make a difference by following Christ, and when we do that and believe who is he and who we are through him, we can then offer hope.

This picture is one I show just about every week in the act discipleship class. This is the visual for the gospel, the good news. I'm all about pictures and visuals to make things easier. To sum this up, on your left we have humanity – sinners, who are living in death. And on your right we have God who is holy, sinless, perfect, but has deep love and desire for humanity who are in great need of wholeness.

To bridge the disconnect between humanity and God, to deliver humanity from the death they deserve, the Father sends Jesus Christ as the bridge, to fill the chasm, as a sacrifice, an atonement for our sins, to then offer us salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And on the top there, you see there is a response on our part. A response to either accept that best gift ever of life eternal, or to not accept it.

Once we accept that gift, once our hearts are awakened to God and the deep love he has for us, we know hope. And we know the one from whom real hope comes from. Once that step is taken, we can then offer our witness of hope.

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for **the hope** that you have."

Last year around this same time, we did a sermon series on discipleship called “unhurried.” And we used this picture of the lady calmly sitting in the street while the world hustled and bustled on around her. She stands out because she is living differently than those around her. How are we doing with that?

Andy Stanley says, Jesus is the hope of the world and the local church is the vehicle of expressing that hope to the world.

Are we living our lives in a way that is causing people to wonder about us? Are people questioning why you can remain so steadfast in the midst of chaos? Are people wondering how you can remain calm and patient when things are falling apart around you? Has anyone asked you how you are making it even though they know you are dealing with grief, or pain, or an illness, or financial strife? Even more so, when people ask you about your peace, about your life, about your joy, are you able to answer using a simple name: Jesus?

Unfortunately, we all know that Christianity is on the decline. We can talk about a million reasons why that’s so, but I want to focus on one. “The local church is waiting for someone else to drive the vehicle.” So many churches can look around and see that attendance is down on Sunday mornings and we know so many local mission partners are desperate for help to serve.

Evangelism has become a scary word – one that people believe is left up to the “professionals,” whatever that means, when in reality, we are all called to share the good news of Christ. It’s estimated from several large surveys that almost 90% of the Christian community DO NOT share the good news. 90%. That’s startling. We learned several months ago there are now more people who claim to be non-Christian than there are Christians. We are now living in the reality of when Jesus told his disciples, The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

In a survey from Barna of a group of folks who were unchurched, 4% were invited and came; 23% were invited but declined; here’s the hard one: 73% were never invited. I’m not saying the only way you can share the good news, offer hope, is through inviting them to church. But man, it should be an easy one.

Our witness is a personal one. When we accept Christ for who he is and then accept who we are in Christ, we realize all the goodness God has done in our lives and that becomes our witness.

Saint John is a community of love and joy and hope. I’ve felt it. I’ve been a recipient of God’s love through the people here. Let’s allow the hope that continues to transform our hearts and this community to be bold in our sharing.

If this makes you nervous, start here. Invite one person to church this week. You may strike out but don’t ever hinder what the Holy Spirit can do through that simple invitation. It may just strike up a heart that had been teetering on further asking questions about this God who loved people so much that he sacrificed his son so that they could know true love and eternal life.

So how do we do this? How do we share our witness and our invitation?

Some How To’s

So then, **how** do we offer hope to the hopeless? There are all kinds of books on the subject. The Bible also has a lot to say. Let’s hear just a couple of those things.

Patience

Paul in writing to Timothy about being “*prepared in and out of season*” says we need to do so “*with great patience and careful instruction.*” “*Patience is a virtue,*” particularly when it comes to outreach.

We are never effective when we go at things like “*a herd of turtles.*”

There is no doubt there is an urgency to the message we seek to share. We’d do well, though, to take the time to develop the relationships necessary to get that message across, hence we need to be patient, patiently urgent.

Jesus was all about developing relationships. He was all about incarnational ministry. He was present in the lives of people, and we need to be as well. Investing in the life of another person is one of the highest callings in all of life. Outreach is best done in the context of relationship, and as we have come to know developing relationships takes time and patience.

Instruction

Paul not only encourages us to be patient, but to offer “*careful instruction.*” If we are not clear about our witness, we will come off as muddled and not very compelling. We would do well to share simply and confidently as God leads.

Gentleness

When it comes to offering hope, Peter says we need to do so “*with gentleness and respect.*” Gentleness is a “*fruit of the Spirit.*” I am of the mind that people have a way of sensing that gentleness. There is a winsome quality to it. It’s simply hard to make headway when we are overbearing.

Respect

Gaining the respect of people comes from a life well-lived, and a big part of that is integrity. People are more likely to respond to our efforts when what we say corresponds with what we do. “*The deeds you do may be the only sermon some person will hear today.*” St. Francis of Assisi

There are variations on that theme like:

- “*You are the only Bible some people will ever read.*”
- “*You are the only Jesus some people will ever see.*”

Offering hope is best done by example. The way we live is always instructive.

Actions really do speak louder than words. There is nothing though like a well-placed word to give definition to what we are trying to get across. My partner in crime up here has a great gift when it comes to that.

Peter writes about “*keeping a clear conscience,*” and maintaining “*good behavior in Christ.*” What does that mean and how does it play out in our lives?

When we wake up, where does our mind go? When we get in our cars, what do we listen to? When we are by ourselves, in whom do we dwell? Where do our thoughts go? What are we worshiping, who are we abiding in?

We've heard don't miss the forest for the trees – in this instance it's about not missing the trees for the forest. We can get so overwhelmed by the magnitude of what we've been called to do in partnership with Christ. But it's really about the small stuff.

In a book called the Tipping Point there's a time discussed when NYC crime took a huge decline in the 1990s. It's about the broken window theory of criminology – if a window is left broken and unrepaired then people will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge and so more serious crimes will increase. So to reverse the crime trend of the 1980s, NYC police put this to the test. Sure enough, they saw a decline in quantity and severity of crime. I'm sure a lot of policemen wondered why they were fixing windows and handling small stuff when there were more serious crimes to address but the little stuff really did matter in the grand scheme of things.

Don't ever underestimate how big of an impact you could have on someone's life by simply providing a meal or a gift card. How special a kind word or a thoughtful question or a card might be to someone who is struggling when you don't even know it. Don't assume that they won't accept that bottled water or that \$5 because they've declined it before. And don't think someone won't appreciate a hug even in a world that's just been through a pandemic.

“Do the work of an evangelist.” II Timothy 4:5 You are loved. You are a child of God.

This week, make it your prayer that God will provide you an opportunity to share that news with someone else so they can live in that same truth.