

November 12, 2017

## **Called to Hope**

### PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

AMEN

### SERMON

We've made it to the middle of November. The church year is rapidly coming to an end. And in the church year we have seasons. And the seasons go from Advent, to Christmas, to Epiphany, to Lent, to Easter, to Pentecost. And each season has its own focus. Each season has its own story to tell. Of the coming of Jesus and the return of Jesus in Advent. Of the birth of the word incarnate of Christmas. Of that Lord and Savior being announced, revealed to the world during the season of Epiphany. That season of repentance, of preparation, and of looking inside, and that self-examination of Lent. Of the great celebration of the fulfilled promise of God in the resurrection and then the giving of the Holy Spirit in Pentecost.

Then we have this long season of ordinary time or Pentecost. And we hear a lot about Jesus' teaching. Teaching the people about the kingdom of God, that's always the focus, the kingdom of God. And as we went through that, well maybe I should say in all truths, as you went through that during the summer since I wasn't here with you. You were hearing the stories that Jesus was doing and the stories that he told trying to teach the people and invite them to God's kingdom. To be a part. To be ready to go through the death and resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit so that they could be citizens of this kingdom that was being brought into the world through Jesus.

And most of those stories and most of the things that Jesus lived out in his life that reflected the kingdom of God are very positive things. He fed those who were hungry. He came to the poor. He came to be with sinners to invite them to a new way of looking at the world and a new way of looking at their lives. He told stories of the lost being found. The hope that Jesus was bringing into the world that there was no one beyond the scope of this invitation to God's kingdom.

As we get closer to the end of the church year, we begin to hear more and more about the final days. That this creation will one day by God's plan, come to an end. That one day, all will stand before the judgment seat of God. Very small part of Jesus' teaching really focuses on that judgment. Very small part of Jesus' teaching focuses on what's to come. Whenever he's asked about that time, he normally responds, "That's none of your business." Maybe to put it a little nicer, he says, "You don't have to worry about that." That time will come when God says that time will come.

Why is it then that we focus so much on the end? Why is it that we focus so much on trying to achieve the very gift that Jesus presents to us free of charge? We worry so much. Am I doing the right thing? Am I doing enough? Are those people out there doing what they should? Should I be condemning them in order to bring them into God's kingdom? I've heard it all as a priest.

We like to think of ourselves as "making it." I've done enough. I'm not the best person but I don't think that God is so displeased with the way that I've lived my life that I am going to be exempt from God's kingdom. This sense of comparison. I may not be the best, but I am not as bad as them. I may not be the wise maiden men in that parable, but I am surely not the foolish ones either. Trying to in our minds and in our hearts, avoid that idea that I'm not living up to the standard that God

demands of me in order to receive the gift of salvation. Why do we do that? Jesus didn't focus on that. He focused on living your life now. Living your life in the presence of God. Knowing that you're in the presence of God. And knowing that God has loved you so much that he sent his only son to the end that all that believe in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. That's the message of hope. That's what we hear more from Jesus other than the time of judgment and you better hope that you are on the right side of that judgment.

We are called to live with the knowledge and understanding of God. A loving God. A God who gives life. A God who redeems life. A God who sustains life so that we can live a life of peace and joy. And if we accept that gift than we want everyone to live that same kind of life of peace and joy, of justice and mercy. Of forgiveness, of celebrating the joyful life that we have been given. Not living in some fear that we're not going to measure up but being changed by the promise of salvation.

Changed by the promise that we have been received already as God's children and now it is a matter of living that out. And not just living it out for me. Not just living it out for myself. But living it out so that other people see and want to be a part. To be citizens of that same kingdom. To begin to see the world not just with human eyes but to see the world as God has seen the world. That's what God wants for us. To see that creation as good. To try to ensure that the hungry are fed, to make sure that the sinful are not left alone but shown a way that is filled with joy, filled with peace, filled with hope. That's our job as God's children. That's what we've accepted. That's what we've promised to God as we became his children. That's what our covenant, our baptismal covenant, is all about.

It's not to live in fear that we won't make the standard or we won't measure up. It's to receive God's promise. And then to live a life that

calls everybody to a new way of looking at each other. A new way of looking at life lived and lived well. And with all that's going on in the world right now, it makes the church, or it should make the church, question whether we're doing a very good job.

When we see so many people who are hurt because some feel that maybe there is no God. That's a question that's been raised when the Bishop was here. It was raised in the confirmation class. It's been raised off and on throughout the whole of my ministry. How are you sure that God even exists? How can you prove that God exists and that the God that you believe exists is this loving and caring God when we see so much hurt and pain and destruction in the world? I can't prove that God exists. I can't prove to you that God exists because God is not provable. Neither can any of them prove to me that God does not exist.

I believe that God exists. I see reflections of God's love throughout creation, throughout the lives of people who are close to me, in my own life as well. Others who don't believe in God they say, that's your own imagination. Well, you know, even if that were true I would rather imagine a life where people cared for one another than a life where people used one another. I'd rather live in a life that holds a higher standard of what could be and hold our leaders to that kind of standard. Where people are not abused, where hope abounds. Where forgiveness takes place. That is a reflection of the kingdom of God that Jesus spoke about, taught about, lived his life about.

You can live your life in fear, a lot of people do. Sometimes they fear that life will not give them what they deserve. Some live in fear that the people say you must live how I tell you to live or you will not receive salvation. They live in fear that that might be right. And that God, if there is a God, has a kind of cosmic Santa Clause persona. Those who meet the good little children criteria, they will receive a gift. And those

who don't will receive not a lump of coal but damnation. You can choose to live in fear. There's plenty to be afraid of in the world. God calls us to something better. God calls us to hope that even though there is pain and hurt in the world that we can do better. That we can reach out and touch one another. That those who have been blessed abundantly can help those who have received less. Or who are living in a place, in a time, or a world where they are not valued. We have the opportunity to value them, to help them in their living of their lives.

We come to the end of the church year. For the next couple of weeks, you're going to hear more stories about the end times. About this time when there will be judgement. That's part of our story. That's part of our faith. That's part of our belief. I don't mean to say that it's not. What I do say is, focus on living. Focus on receiving that gift of God. That peace of God. That love of God. And so, carry that in your heart, and in your mind, to go into the world with that message. With that attitude, with seeing creation, seeing the world. Seeing humanity with the eyes of God. And live in hope and live in peace. And share the love of God.

Father Gregory Hein – Rector

Renee' Evans – Transcriber