

## Hope In The Midst Of The Storm (Luke 8: 22-25)

Let us pray. Dear God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Happy Hope Sunday! Yes, you heard me correctly. Happy Hope Sunday. On this day we are focusing on hope. On this day we are studying hope. On this day we are celebrating hope. And let's face it; most of us on this day are seeking hope. And why shouldn't we?

After all, hope is one of the big three. That's right. According to the Apostle Paul, hope ranks in the top three. Why, Paul puts it right up there with faith and love. That's pretty good company to be keeping. Yes, Paul wrote that there are three really big things that are central to the Christian way of life. They are faith, hope, and love. Faith, hope, and love.

So it is appropriate that on this day we focus on one of the big three. It is appropriate that we take a closer look at this thing called hope. Especially at this time when the gauge on the hope tank seems to be saying, "Low, low, low."

That's right. For most people living in the world, hope seems to be in short supply. Why, even in our own country, the United States of America, surveys show that most people are low on hope. Most people when asked think the best days were in the past and not in the future. And the same holds true for many people in the church. They believe the best days were in the past, not in the future.

What's wrong with this picture? Sure, God has done some mighty things in the past. Scripture is loaded with examples of God creating people. God saving people. God loving people. God healing people. God giving new life to people. But scripture also says that God is going to do even greater things in the future. It says that the whole world is in God's hands. It promises again and again that God will make everything even better than new.

Those promises are reasons for hope. Those promises say that the best is yet to be. Those promises say that we can trust God to make our world just the way God wants the world to be. Have we forgotten those promises? Have we stopped believing in those promises? Have we forgotten that God wants this so much that

God sent Jesus to make it happen? Is that why our hope gauges seem stuck on low?

When I was first asked to preach on Hope Sunday, I must confess that my first reaction was that I didn't know what to do. You see, I was asked to deliver a message on hope and lately all I have seen around me has been hopelessness. Nevertheless, I agreed to do so and I did what I always do when I feel down, discouraged, or hopeless. I turned to the Bible. What I happened to come across was today's gospel passage. Low and behold, it provided me with some hope. It is an honor to share that passage of hope with you today.

Our Gospel reading for today found in Luke 8:22-25 takes place shortly after Jesus has been ministering to a large crowd about the importance of hearing the word of God and then acting on it. After ministering to the crowd, Jesus does what he usually does. He goes off to be alone with God in prayer.

So Jesus "got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.' So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' and he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'" (Luke 8:22-25)

As I read this passage I realized that it's pretty easy to feel hopeless when caught in the midst of a storm. It's crystal clear that in this passage Jesus' followers--his very disciples--were running pretty low on hope. They were afraid. They thought all was lost.

And how about us, his disciples, in this day and age? Just look outside our boat. There are storms all over the place. We find ourselves caught in them time and time again. There are storms of hunger; there are storms of poverty; storms of unemployment; storms of debt; storms of illness; storms of war; storms of economic insecurity; and there are just plain storms. The list of storms goes on and on.

Why wouldn't we feel hopeless? Why wouldn't we begin thinking that our best days may have been in the past? Why wouldn't we be in danger of losing that precious commodity called hope? Why wouldn't we become just like those disciples on the boat? Frightened. Anxious. Afraid. And the first thing that seems to go overboard is hope. Yes, that precious hope somehow slips through our fingers, falls out of the boat, and disappears into the churning sea. And there we sit, without hope. Yes, when we get caught up in the midst of the storms of life, we, like the disciples in this passage, too often feel downright hopeless.

We get discouraged. We are tempted to give up. We question whether we can withstand the large storms. We wonder what difference we can possibly make. We question whether we can make it. And you know what? We are by no means the first human beings to entertain these thoughts.

Once upon a time there was a man who felt hopeless. Out of nowhere he was called upon to be a speaker and a leader. He protested. He was convinced that no one would listen to him or follow him. And he was right. There were times no one listened. There were times no one wanted to follow him. There were times he felt hopeless. That man was Moses. He is still regarded as the greatest prophet and leader in the older testament.

Once upon a time there was a man who was asked to move to another country. He had doubts. There were times he was afraid and ran low on hope. It was daunting for him to think about packing up and moving to a strange new land. But he did it. That man was Abraham. He went on to become the father of many nations and to follow only one God.

Once upon a time there was a couple who felt hopeless. They had always wanted to have a child, but they were in older adulthood and no baby had come for them. As the years went by, they felt more and more hopeless. Just when all hope was almost gone, they gave birth to a healthy baby boy. This couple was Zechariah and Elizabeth. The boy grew up to be none other than John the Baptist. Their long delayed baby had the honor and the duty of preparing and making the path straight for our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

Once upon a time there were a group of men who were asked and wanted to help cure a man's son. They were unable. They gave up. They lost hope. This group was Jesus' very disciples and it happened in the passage right after ours for today.

Here, having just seen Jesus calm a storm, these same disciples were unable to calm the storm raging in this man's son.

Did Jesus give up on them? Did Jesus lose hope in what God could accomplish through them? No, he did not. Jesus did not give up on them or write them off. Jesus continued to guide them and minister to them. That gave them the hope that they needed to spread the good news, to perform miracles, to found the first churches, and to give the world Christ's precious gifts of faith, hope, and love.

And there were times when Jesus seemed to be running low on hope as well. In Luke 9:37-43, when the man told Jesus that his disciples were unable to heal his son Jesus responded by saying "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?" (Luke 9:41).

Now earlier I mentioned that when I turned to scripture it was today's gospel passage that gave me hope. What gave me hope was the realization that when caught in the midst of the storm we aren't alone. And I also realized that hope, like air and water, needs to be replenished. One breath does not last a life time. One sip of water does not last a life time. One ray of hope does not last a life time.

In the gospel passage we see that the disciples had Jesus with them, and that gave them hope. Moses had God with him and that gave him the hope that he needed to speak and to lead. Abraham had God with him and that gave him the hope that he needed to change careers and to settle in a foreign land. Zechariah and Elizabeth had God with them and they knew that God was a God who kept promises. That gave them hope. Jesus being the wise person that he was knew that when he was feeling hopeless all he had to do was go to God who he knew would provide him with the hope to carry on in his mission.

It is the same with us as well. Yes storms are bound to occur and yes we will be caught up in them from time to time. For example, in the book Man's Search For Meaning Victor Frankl talks about his experience in a concentration camp during World War II. He said that what managed to keep him alive while others around him were dying in the camp was hope. Hope that things would get better. This gave him the strength that he needed to survive the storm. He was given hope for the journey.

About four weeks ago, I heard a story about two boys who were climbing a mountain in Colorado. They were caught in the midst of a storm. They were both struck by lightning. One friend was left in critical condition and the other was literally knocked out for several seconds. The friend who was out of it for a short period of time said he felt hopeless. He almost gave up. Then somehow he realized that God was still with them. This filled his tank. This gave him the hope and the strength that he needed to save both his life and the life of his friend.

When caught up in storms of life our hope can run low. This does not make us bad people. This does not mean that we are hopeless cases. Thanks be to God, our hope can be replenished. Thanks be to God, we aren't left on our own. We have God who is always with us. We have the Spirit of his son Jesus the Christ whom he has sent to love us and to give us hope. We have Christ's body, the church with us to remind us of this hope. And we have been given precious brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage and to support us.

Yes, in this life there are storms. But surely, we have much reason to be hopeful. God is still God. God is still faithful. God still loves us. God can still fill us with hope. Thanks be to God. Amen.

-- Zachary Chamberlain Diehl; Hickman Mills Community Christian Church; September 6, 2009