

Hom 2 A Year 1 2016

HOPE

My sermon today is on HOPE. I am not going to give you a Webster's dictionary definition of HOPE. I would prefer to offer you a picture which defines hope equally well. Gerta Weissman survived the Nazi Holocaust. She recalled one spring day in the Concentration Camp when the women were forced to stand for hours on end hungry and tired as the guards did a roll call. It was standing there that she noticed in the corner of this horrid, gray place a tiny flower. It had broken through a concrete slab. She said that even though thousands of feet shuffled on that concrete slab every day not a single person would step on that flower. That tiny flower represented hope and beauty to the women in that camp.

Picture it.
What color would the flower be in your mind? One tiny flower outside a shed housing two hundred women next to another bleak shed and another and another. One flower in the middle of so much pain. That one flower is the definition of hope.

Christianity is a religion of hope. I mean aren't we commanded by Jesus to look for the good in a person other people think is bad. Isn't that kind of like looking for a flower in a concentration camp? We are supposed to believe that if we forgive people who don't want or care for our forgiveness that we can bring something good into the world. Isn't that life breaking through a concrete slab? Christ came into the world and he planted a flower inside the heart of one person and then it began to have seeds and spread throughout the world.

Everyone here knows about the Holocaust of World War II when the Nazis exterminated six million Jews. What most people do not know however is that the Jews suffered a holocaust before World War II.

Between the years 740 and 700 BC the Assyrian army invaded the Holy Land five times. Five times the vast and superior Assyrians stampeded through the hill country of Israel working terror and destruction wherever it went. The Assyrian army had no regard for anyone's culture, no regard for anyone's religion, no regard for human life. They came like a scorpion plague devouring everything and everyone in their path. Over and over and over again the people of Judah were ravaged. The cries of pain seldom ceased. Who could plant a field and have any hope that it would survive to the harvest. Who could bear a child with any confidence that it would reach maturity? It was a horrible forty years that decimated the Jewish people. It was a time when many people gave up. They despaired.

This is the historical context in which the prophet Isaiah is speaking in our bible reading this morning. Isaiah is speaking to those who suffered the first Jewish holocaust. Isaiah's message is a message not of despair but of hope. Listen once again to Isaiah:

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord."

Picture the stump of a tree. The tree has either been burned to the ground or cut down. And I am sure the landscape was filled with trees destroyed by war at this time.

For all purposes the stump looks dead. But then a single shoot comes up from the stump. It starts to grow again. Hope. Isaiah offers an image of hope very similar to the one offered by Gerta Weissman.

Notice where hope comes from: underneath a concrete slab; a dead looking stump, a place of desperation.

It is precisely in moments like these, moments of desperation when a flower blooms, an enlightenment of the soul, an awakening of the spirit, a lifting of blindness that one can see things as they truly are, see things as God sees them.

God came to a dark universe and made light.

God went into the place of the dead and gave us resurrection.

There is a poem that goes like this:

“Listen to the mustn'ts, child. Listen to the don'ts. Listen to the shouldn'ts, the impossibles, the won'ts. Listen to the never haves, then listen close to me. Anything can happen, child. Anything can be.”

– **Shel Silverstein**

“Only in the darkness can you see the stars.”

– **Martin Luther King Jr.**

Christianity is the religion that says anything can be. Virgins can give birth. The dead can be raised. The blind can see. Hope is really a decision to believe in God even when you can't see him

Our God encourages us to live in hope. You and I are free to choose the attitude with which we confront life. We can believe that the world is crumbling under the power of evil or we can believe the Good News of Christmas that God is alive and well and at work in our world bringing in a kingdom of love and justice and freedom. We can face the future with fear

and foreboding, or we can trust in the God who has sustained us through the years and has promised us that He will never forget us nor forsake us regardless of our situation. We can choose to live in continued darkness, or we can step out into the light of hope and triumph and eternal victory. We can live for ourselves alone, or we can make the world a better place to live for all persons.

Jesus teaches us that sometime—somewhere—somehow—something good, not evil, is out there waiting to happen in your life. **The message from the bible on this second Sunday of Advent: Live in Hope. God isn't dead.**

I liked that poem I quoted before so I would like to end by repeating it right now.

“Listen to the mustn'ts, child. Listen to the don'ts. Listen to the shouldn'ts, the impossibles, the won'ts. Listen to the never hases, then listen close to me... Anything can happen, child. Anything can be.”

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