
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow:
31 Days of Reflections on Hope for 2021



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As 2020 draws to an end, we are reflecting on the past 12 months. It has been a year unlike any other. The World Health Organization announced January 9 that a deadly coronavirus had emerged in Wuhan, China. In a matter of months, the virus has spread across the globe to more than 73 million people, resulting in at least 1.6 million deaths. To date, over 300,000 of those deaths were in the United States. We have been quarantined and isolated, and we live with the mandate to wear our masks and socially distance ourselves whenever we are in the company of others.

At the beginning of the year, our economy seemed stable with indicators pointing to another record-breaking year for the stock market. Our unemployment figures indicated unemployment was the lowest in decades. As the year draws to an end, we find our economy is now struggling to stay afloat in rough waters. Unemployment figures are the off the chart, and workers are seeing record layoffs in many of our essential industries.

On the social front, the police-involved killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor this year sparked a wave of peaceful — and sometimes violent — demonstrations and riots across the world to demand an end to police brutality and racial injustice. Our sharp political divisions sparked behavior that was unconventional and uncivil.

In addition to the events that occurred in our nation and world, many of us faced our personal tragedies, transitions and trials. Some of us find that we can no longer take our personal health for granted. Many of us noticed that our health or the health of a loved one has begun to fail and is now frailer. We experienced the death of loved ones and friends. Some of us had to make changes in our lifestyles and increase our level of care or assistance needed to get around. All of us in one way or another are struggling to cope with our aging and the diminished capacity that often comes as the body and the mind matures.

And yet, as the people of God, we have been steadied in our faith by God's presence, provision and providence. So, as we approach 2021, we invite you to begin the year with our devotional entitled: *Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow: 31 Days of Reflections on Hope for 2021*. Written by clergy, church leaders and faithful members of The Inter-Faith Chapel, this booklet shares how their hope and trust in God has seen them through life's situations. Our prayer is that these reflections will encourage you and give you hope as we approach this 21st year of the 21st century assured, that even when we do not know what the future holds, we can have a future filled hope.

Faithfully yours,

Rev. Dr. Woodie Rea,
Senior Minister

Rev. Dr. Ramonia L. Lee,
Minister of Congregational Life

Friday, January 1, 2021

A Future Filled with Hope

Rev. Dr. Ramonia L. Lee

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. - Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

Today is a time for remembrance. It is a time to think about God's faithfulness. It's a time for dreaming, for envisioning and a time for hope. Do we dare ask: What will 2021 be like? Well, the truth is we don't know. But we do know that it belongs to God and in this new year, God is calling us to depend on God's promises and be more aware of God's presence in our lives and in the world around us.

So now, let's look back, not just on what transpired in 2020, but what you experienced of God's grace in the midst of the events of last year. I want you in your mind's eye to see yourself standing in front of the full-length mirror of memory. The first thing I want you to do is count your blessings: the blessing of the measure of health you have; the friends, neighbors and family who have been there for you; the material resources that allowed you to safely quarantine in place; the prayers that have been answered; and the peace of heart and mind you've experienced during your spiritual journey with God this year.

Next, take a moment to think about all the challenging things that happened to you and ask yourself, did your trials teach you anything about patience and compassion? Did your tribulations teach you anything about grace and depending on God and one another? Did the trouble you encountered allow you to experience God's steadfast love in a more profound way? If it did, give thanks to God.

Now, I want you to look ahead to the coming year and as you do, remember how God has blessed you in the past with God's presence, God's providence, God's portion and God's protection. Know that the future is unknown to us, but God's grace is not unknown and God's grace is sufficient for us. We do not know what tomorrow will bring, but we know who holds tomorrow. We do not have to be afraid because we know that God, the Creator of all in the universe, has promised to keep watch over us all the time, including in this coming year.

As people of faith, we have the promise that no matter what challenges may be before us, no matter what losses we may experience, the word of hope found in our scripture reading for today gives us courage and comfort as we embrace a future that belongs to God. Grounded in the security of God's love and faithfulness we can face our todays and our tomorrows. God promises us a future filled with hope. Thanks be to God.

Prayer: God of our todays and our tomorrows, thank You that whatever our future holds, it will be filled with hope, as long as we keep our hand in Your hand each day of 2021. Amen.

Saturday, January 2, 2021

Great is God's Faithfulness to Me

Rev. Dr. Ramonia L. Lee

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. - Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)

The title of this devotional book, *Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow*, is a line from my favorite hymn, *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*. It is based on a poem written by Thomas Chisholm. He wrote *Great Is Thy Faithfulness* as a testament to God's faithfulness through his very ordinary life. Born in a log cabin in Franklin, Kentucky, Chisholm became a Christian when he was twenty-seven and entered the ministry when he was thirty-six, though poor health forced him to retire after just one year. During the rest of his life, Chisholm spent many years living in New Jersey and working as a life insurance agent. Still, even with a desk job, he wrote nearly 1,200 poems throughout his life, including several published hymns. Chisholm explained toward the end of his life, "I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God and that He has given me many wonderful displays of His providing care, for which I am filled with astonishing gratefulness."

The hymn has three verses and a chorus. Verse 1 speaks of God's faithfulness revealed in God's Word, and is adapted from James 1:17: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.* Verse 2 tells us of God's faithfulness revealed in creation. The seasons, the sun, moon, and stars all continue on their courses perfectly, orderly, quietly—guided by God's faithful hand, without any help from us. Verse 3 reminds us of God's faithfulness revealed in our lives. God pardons all our sins, fills us with God's peace, assures us of God's presence, gives us strength, hope, and blessings too numerous to count!

To me, faithfulness is one of God's unchanging attributes. It means God's unchanging nature and faithfulness are the foundation of my hope. Because God is sovereign Ruler of the universe, I never have to fear that our world is out of God's control. Because God is faithful, I can have peace of mind in any circumstances in life. Although my physical being may change as the seasons of life pass by, the faithfulness of God will always be the same. Since I belong to God through Christ, God will never forget, neglect, or abandon me. Just think, with each new day, God gives us the chance to prove God's faithfulness. And throughout all of time, God's never once been proven wrong, for His mercies are new every day. In this God, I place my hope.

Prayer: Dear Lord, no matter what comes my way, I will put my hope in You as I trust in Your great faithfulness and I await your new mercies this day. Amen.

Sunday, January 3, 2021

Kept By God

Rev. Dr. Woodie Rea

*The Lord will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life.
The Lord will watch over your coming and going from now and forevermore.
Psalm 121:7-8 (NIV)*

“Out with the old and in with the new.” That is an expression that we often hear as we celebrate the New Year. Many people are more than ready to throw out much of the *old* from last year. However, just as important to the process of beginning a new year, is deciding what to keep.

In today’s passage, we receive the assurance that God will keep us! The word *keep* shows up six times in Psalm 121 so clearly this is a point of emphasis being made by the psalmist. There is a transition from the present tense used in the earlier verses, to the future tense used in verses 7-8. This poetic shift reminds us that God will keep us in both our present situation, as well as through all the days of this next year.

We should be careful not to mistake God’s “keeping” as the absence of conflict. Indeed, there will be challenges, difficulties, and losses in the year ahead. We have no idea of what the next twelve months will bring, but we do have the confidence that we will not be alone and that the Lord will keep us.

At every moment in 2021, God is watching over us. In all of our comings and goings of this new year, God is with us. In times of joy and celebration, as well as times of hardship and suffering, God will keep us. Let us continually live each day of the new year as people “kept by Jesus, kept by the power of God, kept through toils and trials, and treading where Jesus trod.”

This year, May the Lord bless you and keep you!

Prayer: *Gracious God, thank you for blessing me and keeping me. Today I am reminded that you are with me in both my present and future days. I praise you for the assurance of your presence and extent of your protection. Help me, I pray, to live with the confidence that you are watching over me, guiding me, and keeping me, through all the days ahead. Through Christ I pray. Amen.*



Monday, January 4, 2021

Father Knows Best!

Elizabeth Brooks-Evans

But those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise up on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary, they will walk and not grow weak.

Isaiah 40:31 (TEV)

As I left work that rainy evening and headed for the 30 mile drive to my graduate school class, traffic was already backed up. “Oh God,” I prayed, “please let me get there in time to choose the practicum on Women’s Issues that I want so badly.” But I arrived very late and the only practicum slot left was Geriatric Counseling which no one wanted including me. Feeling let down and dejected, I begrudgingly accepted it only to learn in the months to come that not only was there a great need for professionals in that field, but also counseling the elderly provided both immediate and long term rewards. Throughout a successful career in the field, I have often recalled the verse in Isaiah 40:31 with gratitude to God for answering my prayer in a way that brought great purpose into my life. The passage brought me to the realization that my initial thoughts and behavior when I didn’t get specifically what I asked God for indicated that I felt I was in control – not God. But I learned the value of trusting in the Lord who knows best. Even if I feel as if I’m not heading in the direction I intended, I pray, relax, and trust in the support of the Lord.

Renewed in strength again and again as I’ve grown spiritually, my petitions to the Lord have come to be not for specifics, but for what is best for me and others for whom I pray.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank you so much for helping me to realize that when we who love you trust in your assistance and your help, you always work for our highest good. Amen*



Tuesday, January 5, 2021

God's Guidance

Myriam M. Lawrence and James T. Lawrence Jr.

*May the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Romans 15:13 (NIV)

The first thing we do when we get in our car is to welcome God's company and guidance before driving out in our community, trusting the God of hope is with us in our travels.

Norbeck Park is one of our favorite quiet places we can go for a moment to enjoy fresh air and nature. We thank God for the opportunity of using of all senses He has given us to feel, hear and see the beautiful variety of colorful landscapes, clouds, and sky He has created for us to enjoy.

In our conversation with the God of hope, we experience how the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with joy and peace. It is a refreshing peaceful experience. Have you ever invited the God of hope to be in your travels?

Prayer: *Dear God, guide me each day in my walk with you. May the Holy Spirit guide me to your presence and fill my spirit with joy and peace. Amen*



Wednesday, January 6, 2021

Interesting Times

Rev. Dr. Woodie Rea

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds of purchase and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

Jeremiah 32: 14-15 (NIV)

We are living in *interesting times* and it is easy for us to become overwhelmed by all the *interesting* changes and challenges taking place all around us. What word of hope can there be for us?

The people of Jerusalem in our text could tell us a thing or two about living in *interesting times*. The Babylonian army had laid siege to their city and the people were desperate for some relief. They had been held up in their homes, had suffered a severe disease, and knew that the enemy would soon be taking them far away into captivity. The future looked bleak!

Surprisingly, in the middle of all this, Jeremiah purchased a plot of land. He sealed the deed in jars and stored them away for the future. Why did he buy this field in the midst of such desperate times? He did this as a statement of trust in God and as a symbol of hope in the future.

To act in hope in the face of desperation does not come easily. When despair surrounds us like an army, it can feel all-consuming. But we have reason to reach for hope, because we know that the Babylonian exile came to an end. Jeremiah's seemingly foolhardy purchase proved to be a powerful investment in the future.

Today, in these *interesting times* we might feel as if we are under siege. However, despite how overwhelming the forces of division, despair, and disruption might seem, the future lies ultimately in the hands of God. The word of the Lord comes to us today, and it is a word of hope. A word of hope for today and a bright hope for tomorrow!

Prayer: *O God, give me a peace that endures. Give me your own dear presence to cheer me and to guide. Grant me strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow; blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! Amen.*

Thursday, January 7, 2021

Sharing the Greatest Gift of Christmas

Nancy Czujko


And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.
1 Corinthians 13:13 (The Harper Collins Study Bible)

During the nine months of this pandemic tragedy, I have felt my thoughts racing and my failure to focus frustrating. I wanted to pray in some organized way to ensure that I prayed for those suffering so they could know the steadfast faith and hope I know. Most of all, I desperately wanted to pray that the love from our Heavenly Father be present and known to all those in pain from sickness, homelessness, fear, etc. right now. And yet the prayer seemed elusive and my inability to focus has continued these long months.

In December, my husband and I always celebrate the anniversary of our engagement. This year my husband handed me a small gift which I tore open. There in big print on the cover of a new CD was the word "PRAY." The CD contained sacred Christmas music by a prominent choir. As a choir member missing singing, this gift was perfect! But the simplicity of the word PRAY seemed an instant and clear direction to simply talk to our Lord and ask that all may know the comfort of the greatest gift we can receive, the love of our Father in Heaven. This is the gift from our Christ that we can then share with others.

Simply *talk* with the Lord anytime, anywhere. As your words ascend to God, they become prayer.

Prayer: *I pray that the everlasting love from you, Father in Heaven, be known by all and that this love through my steadfast prayers, heal and comfort me in this my hour of great need. Amen.*



hope.
pray.
wait.

Friday, January 8, 2021

God's Invitation

Bertie Knisely

Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28 (NIV)

As I stood in the darkness in the historic church square, I felt burdened by anxiety and doubt. I was facing a personal crisis that threatened to tear apart my life as I knew it. Through the darkness, the church bell began to chime, breaking through my thoughts. Within me I heard God's invitation saying, "Come to me, so that I can give you the strength you need. Come to me, and allow me to carry your burdens. Come to me, and you will find rest for your soul." Strengthened by God's promise, my anxiety lifted as I stepped forward into the darkness.

Now, more than thirty years later, a pandemic has challenged all of our lives, turning life as we know it upside down. At times the darkness of the unknown can threaten to overwhelm us. In the midst of it all, God's invitation is still here, offering peace and hope to each of us.

Do you feel weary from anxiety or "pandemic fatigue"? Are you burdened by loneliness or poor health? Remember that you are not alone. God is continually reaching out to you in love, whispering, "Come to me. Give me your weariness and your burdens. Come to me and I will give you rest." Whatever your state of being is in this moment, turn to God who is waiting to give you rest for your soul.

Prayer: Oh Holy one, thank you for your assurance that you are with me in this moment. Help me to open myself fully to you as you lovingly invite me into your presence. Opening to you, I feel your embrace as you hold my weariness and burdens. Trusting in you, I rest in your Love. Amen



Saturday, January 9, 2021

Faith and Hope in Healing

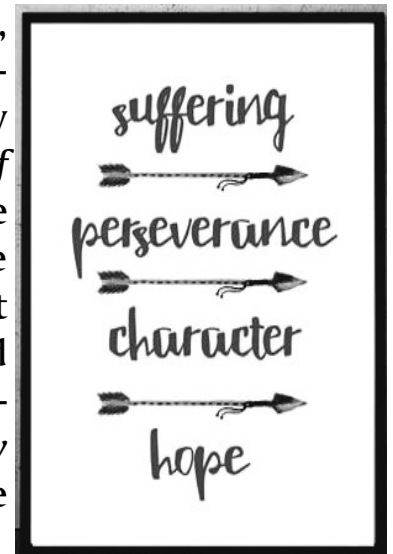
Ginger Samara

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Romans 5: 3-4 (NIV)

Have you ever suffered physically for a prolonged period of time? It can wear you down and cause hope, if not buoyed up by faith, to start to fade. For three months in the summer of 2011, I was very ill. Two hospitals could not find the source of my bouts of life threatening sepsis. There were many tests, surgery, ambulance trips to the emergency room and days in the ICU. Suffering has value in that it produces *perseverance* or *steadfast endurance*. One of the distinctives of the Christian faith is that believers are taught to glory and rejoice in the midst of suffering rather than to sigh and submit to it. Such perseverance develops character. The word character indicates tested value. The tested and proven follower of God is a living demonstration of the character-developing power of the Gospel. Our present access to God gives us the hope of sharing the divine glory, so with our sufferings. These help to produce character, and approved Christian character finds its ultimate place in the presence of God.

So from sufferings, through perseverance, character and hope, my husband and I worked our way through a difficult and unsure time. We prayed, several churches prayed, our Bible study prayed. We felt those prayers and came through this *valley of the shadow of death* – Psalm 23:4. Our hope and faith were strengthened by my suffering. My husband was by my bedside the entire time. He and the Lord were my rocks. I worked at keeping the words *hope and faith in the Lord* in my mind and heart each day. I tried being kind and cooperative to those caring for me in the hospital. I clung to *The joy of the Lord is my strength*. -Nehemiah 8:10. All this worked together to bring me back to an active life, touched by the hand of God.



Prayer: *Dear Lord, when hard times come, let me remember that sufferings produce perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. Let me always know that hope and faith are coupled with the love of God. God's steadfast love covers me forever. Thank you, Lord, for your amazing healing powers. Amen*

Sunday, January 10, 2021

Community of Hope

Rev. Diane Hugger

*This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive),
that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men,
and especially of those who believe.*

First Timothy 4:9-10 (The Life Application Bible, NIV)

Stitching Together the Hope Quilt is the title of an article that appeared in the Metro section of the *Washington Post* on November 30, 2020. This article speaks of a quilt that is being stitched together to show gratitude for doctors, nurses, and other front line health-care workers who are fighting a war against an invisible disease – COVID-19. It also honors those who have become ill or died from this disease. The idea of the Hope Quilt came from the AIDS Memorial Quilt that started in the 1980s as a memorial to people who died from AIDS-related causes.

Diane Canney, an artist and founder of the Hope Quilt project, sends out kits of cloth and other art materials to groups, and people around the country who ask to participate in the development of the quilt. The quilt, according to Canney, is a way to “comfort, honor, and remember people – to be sure we captured this moment so we will know what it looked like 30 years from now.”

And herein lies the hope found in 1st Timothy 10. . . *that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.* The ultimate purpose of the Hope Quilt is remembrance. Thirty years from now the hope is that people who labored to save lives and those who lost their lives will be remembered. So it is for those of us who have put our hope in the living God, who is savior of all humankind. As the community of faith, we are in the hands of the Master Quilter who binds us together in faith and love to strengthen and support one another in good times and difficult times. We live in the hope that Jesus Christ is never far from us – leading us and guiding us to a place of safety and peace.

The lyrics to a familiar hymn come to mind when I think of the words in 1st Timothy 4:10, *My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.* There will be times when we feel like we are sinking and the road ahead is dark and lonely, let us put our hope in the living God, who is our Lord and Savior.

Prayer: *May I rest quietly in my restored hope. Let the power of our Living God reign in my heart. Amen.*

Monday, January 11, 2021

Keeping Hope Alive!

Tyra Thompson

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,
for He who promised is faithful.*

Hebrews 10:23 (NIV)

We are living in what is called a *post-Christian* culture. We all have someone in our lives who is a nonbeliever or who has left the church. In fact, more and more people are rejecting Christianity and saying they have no religion. It is disheartening to see people leaving the faith, and the pressures to conform to a faithless culture seem to be increasing all the time.

Today, we are reminded and encouraged to cling tightly to the hope that lives within us, knowing that God always keeps His promises. Even in times like these when we are experiencing isolation, despair, and discouragement, we are encouraged to hold tightly to the One who is faithful. All other things may fail us, but Jesus is faithful. His promises are true.

Let us continue to be encouraged and to encourage each other, even when times are tough. We do not trust in one who is undependable; we trust in the One who is faithful and never changing.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, in a world that is ever changing and in a society that has all but rejected the truth of Your Word, I thank You for being our never-changing Savior. Develop in me an unwavering hope in Your promises, knowing that despite the evil and wickedness that seem to be suffocating all that is good and pure, Your plans and purposes for me will one day be fulfilled. May I hope in You unswervingly and live my life to Your praise and glory. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*



Tuesday, January 12, 2021

Psalm 62 (NLT)

O God, in You alone my soul waits in silence; from You comes my comfort.
You alone are my rock and my salvation.
You are my fortress and I shall not be greatly shaken.

In You alone my soul waits in silence, from You comes my hope.
On You rests my salvation and hope; You are my mighty rock and my refuge.

I place my trust in You at all times.
I pour out my heart before You.
I know you hear my prayer,
I know you care, for You are my refuge, my blessed hope.

In You, O God, I put my confidence;
Not in vain human actions or riches; those change with time,
but you never change Lord.

One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard:
“Power belongs to you, God; and the power of love is unfailing.”
You will not reject any who come to you.
You will have mercy on those who pray.
You are a great and gracious God and in You alone,
I put my trust.



Yes, my soul,
find rest in GOD;
my hope
comes from him.

-Psalm 62:5

Wednesday, January 13, 2021

Trust and Patience Often Walks Hand in Hand

Maggi Lindley

But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Romans 8:25 (NIV)

Throughout the Bible, there are many verses that call for trust and patience. Perhaps trust and patience are some of the most difficult things for us to carry out through our lives, but if you can do it, these can be two of the most rewarding words, too.

Felix Mendelssohn wrote in his majestic oratorio *Elijah* the following words: “Oh rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him, and He will give you your heart’s desire. Commit thy ways unto Him and trust in Him.”

I have held fast to these words since singing this oratorio many years ago and these have proved over and over again to be true. Trust comes when you place whatever you desire wholly in His hands and then let the Lord take it from there. This is not an easy task for us when we want to run our own lives! Doing this also takes great patience. The Lord works in His timing, not ours. The answer may come today, but it may take years. Through it all, we must leave it up to Him, after all He knows best what we truly need. The answer may come with great fanfare or excitement, but more often than not it will come with a still small voice or in a way least expected. Sometimes we may be disappointed with the answer, but then find it to be the right thing for that time in our lives.

Regardless, God will always be there with us and for us. We can trust Him and wait patiently, because we definitely have a trusted friend in Him.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me to trust in You for my hopes and dreams and give me the patience to wait on Your answer in Your time. Thank You for always being with me as I wait for Your still small voice. Amen.*

faith
hope
trust

Thursday, January 14, 2021

Where Should I Go?

Maureen Harris

But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.

Micah 7:7 (NIV)

Like a lot of people, I am sure, my prayer life ebbs and flows. When in the midst of a crisis, I pray unceasingly; when the crisis is over, I ease up. During this current period of uncertainty, many of us are experiencing a bevy of emotions: fear, anger, and impatience, among others, and have become glued to *the news station*. All are wreaking havoc with our emotional and spiritual well-being. We may be praying like never before or maybe not praying at all.

People who were a part of my formative years used to talk about those who could *get prayers through* (earnest praying people) and *ceiling* prayers (those whose prayers hit the ceiling and went no farther). I knew that I had been in *ceiling* mode for too long, so one morning, early in this pandemic I did something about it.

As I stood at my kitchen counter after hearing the latest dire news reports, my hand landed on the Lenten scriptures that had been given to us for the Lenten class at The Chapel. I began a practice of reading several scriptures every day, after which I prayed. For the first few weeks, I did little more than cry during my attempts to reconnect. Eventually, I felt the presence of the Lord and I knew that the Lord heard my cries. I never planned what I would say during my prayer; I let my heart lead me, as I watched in hope for the Lord. This scripture from Micah 7:7, reminded me of an old church song that ended with these lines, “Needing a friend to help me in the end, tell me where should I go but to the Lord.”

Prayer: *Gracious God, bless me with the ability and desire to earnestly pray, in the name of your Son who taught us to pray. Amen.*



Friday, January 15, 2021

Brighter Days

Rev. Vernice Carney

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

Proverbs 13:12 (NIV)

The pandemic affected everyone differently. During the pandemic, my appetite increased and I gained weight considerably. My daughter's appetite decreased and she lost weight tremendously.

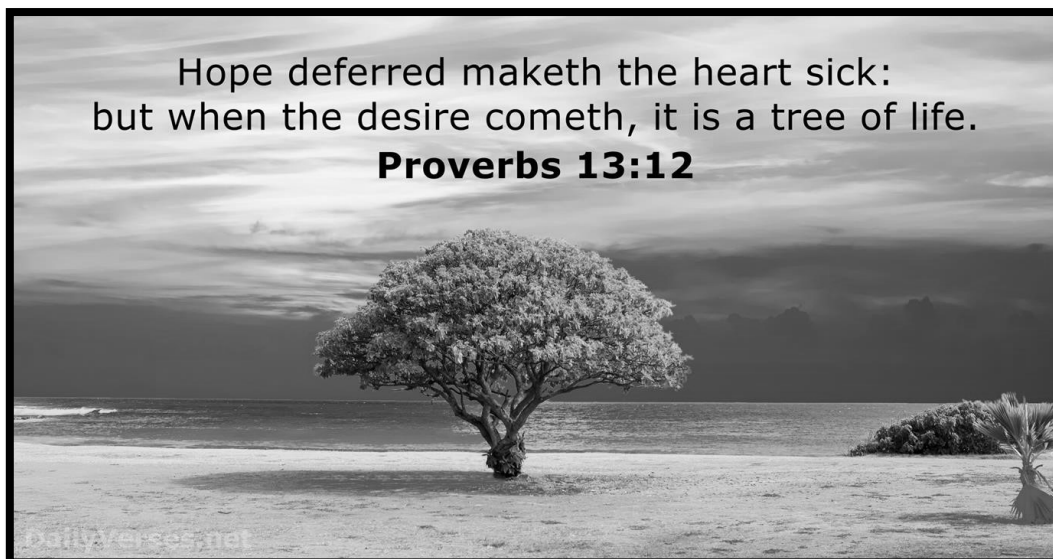
At the beginning of COVID-19, I prayed for peace and guidance. My prayers were answered. My spiritual self was peaceful but not my physical self. My problem is I am pre-diabetic, overeating and gaining weight. That is not good. My prayers against overeating seemed unanswered.

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, that is, when what is desired is slow coming, the heart is bruised and hope of receiving what is desired is lost. But when a longing is fulfilled it is a tree of life; a breath of spring.

The news of a vaccine soon to come, gives a ray of hope for an end to a bad period. The promised vaccine is a breath of spring and hope for brighter days.

During the pandemic, I was reminded of God's promise to Joshua. When God assigned Joshua the task of leading the Israelites into the Promised Land, God promised Joshua, . . . *I will never leave you nor forsake you.* - Joshua 1:5 NIV Those words are for us today. God will never leave us nor forsake us.

Prayer: *Father, thank you for love and mercy, for trials that taught us to trust you and for scientists, doctors, nurses, and health care providers. Amen.*



Saturday, January 16, 2021

My Portion

Arlene Kaiser

The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

Lamentations 3:24 (KJV)

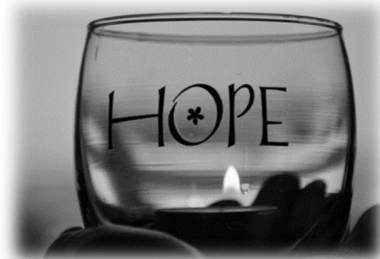
If the Lord is my *portion*, that is all that I need. In Psalm 16:5, King David refers to God as his portion. In the King James Bible, the word *inheritance* is used. Again, in Psalm 142, David says, *I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.* Psalm 142:5 KJ

What are these Old Testament words telling me? God is all that I ever need. I inherit grace and strength from God just as I inherited my physical traits and lessons from my parents. I am given a portion of the whole of God's grace, leaving everyone else his or her portion. It is a sharing, a reminder that I am part of the whole.

God is my source of all that is good both in this life and the next. God promises that I will never be alone. It is his promise that I will not be forgotten and that his divine help is given all along the way. Yes, I need food, clothing, and shelter, but I have always been given the ability and opportunities to work to provide these for myself and to share with others even when it wasn't always easy. What a blessing!

As I read the Psalms, I find more encouragement and reminders of God's promises. *My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.* Psalm 73:26 KJ

Prayer: *Oh God, both my Heavenly Father and King, the strength of my heart and my portion forever, I thank you for what I know for sure: that I lack for nothing and that I am given continuous grace and hope, even without asking. I hope to be always grateful. I hope to do your will. I hope to recognize the opportunities you give me to serve you and others. Be always with me, I pray. Amen.*



Sunday, January 17, 2021

The Moonlight: Looking at Nature for Signs of Hope

Rev. Barbara McKenzie, BCC

I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits and in his Word I put my hope.

Psalm 130:5 (NIV)

I recognize and revere God as Creator God. *The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.* – Isaiah 40:28 When I sing, *How Great Thou Art*, I see God in the sun, moon, stars, rainbows and trees. And yes, I praise God for the sun that watches over us by day and the moon that is the guardian of the night.

I've always had a fascination with the moon. It's a life force. Run-away slaves were guided by the moon on their quest to reach the shores of Maryland, then on to freedom in the north. Native Americans named the moons to keep track of time for farming. I recently saw a majestic full moon from my sunroom at Leisure World and alerted all my friends and family. It was spectacular. Our God is an awesome God.

The moon was the backdrop of some of my most profound encounters with God. Gliding down the Nile on a boat in Egypt, riding in a Jeep on the hills and mountains in Sedona, AZ, walking Magen's Bay Beach in St. Thomas, VI or viewing Pittsburgh, PA from my beloved scenic overlook, Mount Washington. God met me there in all of these places, spoke to my heart and gave me a life changing message.

The movie *Moonstruck* back in the eighties was a delightful romantic comedy where folks were looking for love under the shining bright moon in Brooklyn. I love happy endings. Just a few years ago, the movie *Moonlight* won Academy Awards. In the movie, little Black boys searching for self and identity appeared blue under the powerful moon light on a beach in Miami.

The moon has always been a symbol of God's power and love. It's a heavenly body moving around the earth giving us God's light and marking the seasons. We praise you, O Lord for your power and might.

Looking at the times, we all have challenges, difficulties and frustrations in life. But we can rest and be assured that God will show up, answer our prayers and act in our lives. He puts the moon in the sky to guide us and to remind us that He is real. *I hope, Lord, my whole being hopes and I wait for God's promise.* Psalm 130:5 CEB

Monday, January 18, 2021

Hope of the World

Dr. James M. Shopshire, Sr.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

I Corinthians 13:7 (ESV)

In 2021, The Inter-Faith Chapel is set in the midst of a community of older adults charged with the work of building a primary faithful community which is always seeking to discern and do God's will. The work of the People of God (the church) is to serve and care for God's People (everyone, everywhere) in the community where it is located. The Chapel can also help extend God's love in the wider context from local to the global community.

To the extent that we are blessed to live in the year 2021, we will be faced with the need to learn new ways and employ new techniques of faithful response to God's call. In all that we do and endure, we must identify ourselves as members of God's cloud of witnesses in the here and now. Our work will always be to build community as those who understand, interpret and live out the Scriptures in the light of faith, love and grace.

Is there truly any hope for growth in 2021? I believe that hope is alive, and that hope in God and in the possibility for true and beloved community is with us. For those who faithfully believe and are growing in grace, hope is a platform for constructive loving action. Pray that members of The Inter-Faith Chapel, as well as God's people everywhere, across our world will be enlightened, encouraged and empowered to participate in God's movement to deliver us from chaos to beloved community. This is our hope for ourselves and God's world. So let it be.

Prayer: God of love and God of power help us to see Your presence and loving action in the church and in the world. Keep hope alive in us and through us. Guide and direct us in the way of love. Hold us in Your care as we seek to extend Your care to others. Embrace us and hold us together in the community of love that You are growing with creative, redeeming and sustaining power. Amen.

Tuesday, January 19, 2021

Trust Like the Youngest of All

Heidi Bender

Let your unfailing love surround us Lord, for our hope is in you alone.

Psalm 33:22 (NLV)

What comforting words for the unexplainable world we live in today. We know from many other Bible stories that we are not the first people to live through a pandemic. We also know from these Bible stories that when we put our trust in God we, too, shall come through this pandemic. God has always told us to trust in Him and we shall have the promise of Heaven on Earth.

Earlier in Psalm 33:15, the psalmist writes: “He made their hearts, so he understands everything they do.” Because God made our hearts, God knows we can put our trust in Him, He designed us that way.

As I was preparing to write this devotional, I thought about a friend who has a new grandson, and she has been sharing precious pictures of him with me. What came across my mind is her grandson has to put his complete trust in his parents and grandparents. There is not a single thing he can do for himself right now.

As children of God, we are like my friend’s new grandson. We are completely dependent on the love of our Father. If we do not TRUST in Him, we will not experience the promise of Heaven on Earth. We can try to go it alone, but without our trust in Him, our protection will always fall short.

As a child of God, will you join with me in putting your trust in our Lord? Will you choose to walk blindly and unprotected, or will you choose to use your God-given courage to trust in Him? Let us join hands together today and serve our God of trust for a better future

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, as if I am looking at you through the eyes of a baby, let me put all of my trust in you today and always. Amen.*

 Hope

Wednesday, January 20, 2021

Faith and Hope Will Get You Through

Anne Dobbs

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

-Romans 5:5 NIV

I was 15 when I met my first husband. We dated all through my high school years and two years after graduation we were married. Our first child was born thirteen months later. My world seemed perfect. A second child, a beautiful little boy was born three years after the first. Our baby was not quite two years old when he was diagnosed with cerebral palsy and my husband left us. My world was shattered; but I had one thing going for me. I had a strong faith in God and I placed my hope and trust in Him.

I knew with all my heart that God was with us and had a plan for us. I once told my girlfriend that I would never marry again unless I found someone similar to her husband, a Boy Scout leader, devoted husband and family man. Eighteen years passed. I never doubted that God was with us; I was happy being a mom. My mother died and then a month later my girlfriend died. I was once again grieving.

After my girlfriend's death, her widower would stop in for coffee and to talk. He said I understood his grief because I was also grieving the loss of my mother. We were married a year later and Lieutenant Commander Dobbs became the love of my life. As a youngster, I said I wanted a family of six. With his four children and my two, I now had a beautiful family of six. My life with him was better than I could have ever dreamed of. He was another gift from God in my life.

Never lose your faith. Always put your hope in God for you never know what is in God's plan. If you keep the faith, if you trust in God, and if you continue to put your hope in God, wonderful things will, in God's good time, come our way.

Prayer: Dear God, I pray that those who find themselves in pain, mental or physical, find strength in faith and hope and comfort in your love. Amen.



Thursday, January 21, 2021

A Living Hope in a Fading World

Juanita Sealy-Williams

All honor to God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; for it is his boundless mercy that has given us the privilege of being born again, so that we are now members of God's own family. Now we live in the hope of eternal life because Christ rose again from the dead. - 1 Peter 1:3 (The Living Bible)

A seventeen year old girl, the oldest daughter of two Haitian immigrants, gave birth to a baby girl in Brooklyn, New York in 1941. The parents were struggling to feed their five children with the low paying salaries of a domestic and a factory worker. The father had lost his job and hope and had gone back to Haiti where he died before his first grandchild was born. His widow was left to raise their children and granddaughter, hoping that they would all survive and succeed in America. She had hope and faith in God and Jesus Christ that they would all gain eternal life.

In this letter of Peter to the Jewish Christians who had been driven out of Jerusalem, we hear him reminding them that they were chosen to be part of God's family by God's mercy. They were living as immigrants in new lands having been born again in Christ Jesus. They were living in the hope of eternal life because Christ rose again from the dead. I imagine how fearful they must have felt, not sure if they would find work, a home and food for their families in a strange land. Peter reminded them that God would make sure that they would make it to heaven if they continued to have hope and faith in Jesus Christ.

All around them were wars, enemies and conflict. All around us today, there is disease, crime, racism, anger, poverty, homelessness, and division. The world as we once knew it and believed was getting better, now seems to be fading and falling apart. Families are fighting one another and losing hope for themselves and the future of their children. But we must not lose hope in Christ or in the greater possibilities of this future world. We must keep our faith and know that God is still helping us to survive and succeed. Let us continue to pray for one another, including those who don't agree with us or believe as we do. When you see someone who is discouraged, try to encourage them through prayer and friendship. Let us keep hope alive and well in our community!

That Haitian American woman was my grandmother, Emily Charlemagne. She prayed for me and always encouraged me as well as her other 19 grandchildren. She became an American citizen and earned her GED at 65 years old! She would be so proud to know that she has over 30 great grands, many of whom have professional careers and graduate degrees. Her hope and faith did not fail and I'm hoping to see her again in heaven.

Prayer: Dear God, please help me to grow stronger in my faith and belief that there is still hope for this world. I pray that Jesus will continue to enlighten me to find ways to instill hope in others as well as myself. Please give me the love that will encourage an immigrant to have hope in possibilities and faith in Jesus Christ. Amen

Friday, January 22, 2021

Let There Be Light

Susan Krause

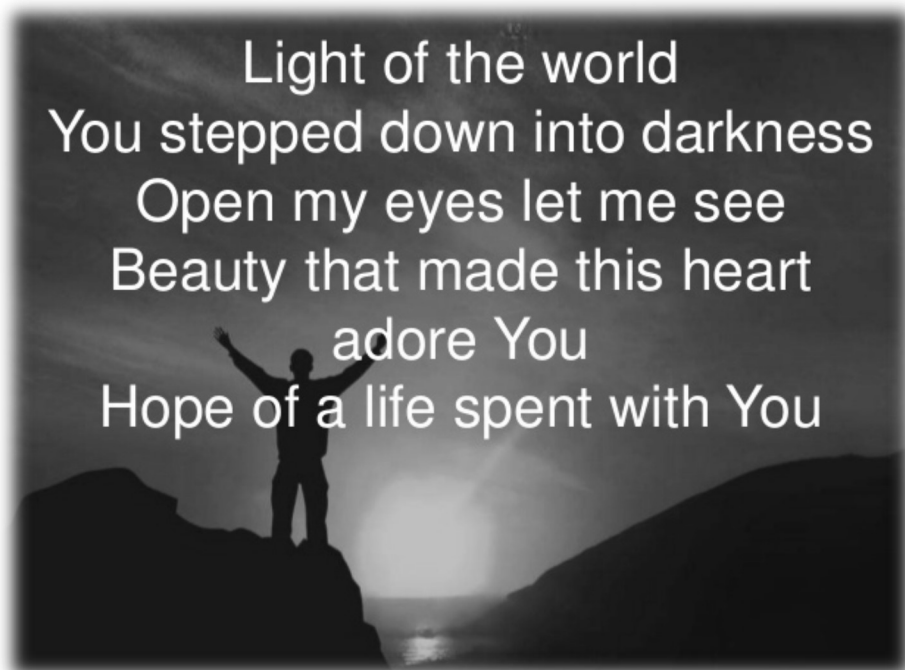
*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*

John 8:12 (ESV)

Growing up in my secular Jewish family in Chicago during the 50's and 60's, I found myself in awe each Advent season when I would look out our living room window to see some of the neighbors putting up outdoor Christmas lights. At that time and looking through the eyes of a child, my thoughts were nothing more than the fact that they were "awesome". Please keep in mind that this was a time when Jewish people felt segregated from all the festive Christmas activities. After all, the Chanukah my family somewhat celebrated was only regarded as a minor holiday.

Today, my joy is unparalleled since professing my faith in Jesus 50 years ago. Yes, as a child, I was drawn to the Christmas lights. But as a Jewish Christian adult, I know that Jesus is, indeed, the light of the world to all who follow Him and that we don't have to walk in the darkness. Hallelujah! There is always hope with our Jesus—especially during the darkness of this Covid-19 pandemic.

Prayer: *Light of the World, You are my hope. Keep my eyes fixed on You. Amen.*



Saturday, January 23, 2021

Giving Account for Your Hope

Sherry-Lynne Stargel

...you must worship Christ as Lord of your life.

And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.

1 Peter 3:15 (NLT – New Living Translation)

In August 2014, the doctor said the word I had dreaded all of my adult life, *CANCER*. Surprisingly, I was calm and had no fear of what was to come. I shared the news with my friend, Doris, who said “God is in control.” What a true statement. I now wear a bracelet that serves to remind me to “trust in the Lord.” Prayer offered in faith healed my body.

To know Christ as your Savior is the key to hope and salvation. He is your foundation. The beginning of knowing and sharing your hope is being able to express your faith. It is written not to store the light within us, but to share God’s Word. This hope is the confident trust with the expectation of God’s fulfillment. Hebrews 10:23 states, *Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep His promise.* This allows us to lead faithful lives with God. It has aided us to survive during our feelings of loss, depression, and anxiety at this time of a pandemic and political turmoil. This relationship with the Lord as our Savior asks us to trust in Him during stressful times. “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” We must be able to explain our faith to people who seem not to understand the peace within us. As believers, we need to know in our hearts how to present this truth.

Prayer: *Most gracious Heavenly Father, I give you praise and thanks for the gift of salvation. May I always know the words to explain this gift. Help me to not only show the light and hope in your Word, but also to share my joy, faith, and salvation in Jesus Christ. Lord, hold me through these days of anxiety, depression, and isolation. I pray that I will always be able to give account for the faith I have in Christ. Amen.*

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "I. My hope is built on noth - ing less". The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment line with lyrics: "Than Je - sus' blood and righ - teous - ness;". The music is written in a simple, accessible style with a key signature of one flat (F major/D minor).

Sunday, January 24, 2021

Better Together!

Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called.
Ephesians 4:4 (NIV)

Bread and butter. Cookies and milk. Salsa and chips. Some things are better TOGETHER!

But in Ephesus around AD 60, Paul knew building a community of Christ able to come and stay together in the Mediterranean's most important trading center would require hard work. Indeed, from his prison perspective, he knew work was only part of the recipe needed for a deep faith community. Most essential would be unity—which only God could provide.

In Ephesians chapters 1-3, Paul had outlined blessings offered to both Gentiles and Jews as children of God. His inspirational list included redemption, grace, and even citizenship *with the saints and...household of God*. Now in Ephesians 4:4, Paul gets down to brass tacks, emphasizing blessed believers are responsible to lead a life that demonstrates oneness.

But how could unity be possible then--or now--when we often hear that our nation is more divided than ever? When racial and economic inequities leave many lives caught in what Pulitzer Prize winning author Isabel Wilkerson calls a “powerful caste system”? When a pandemic keeps requiring us to live and stand farther apart from each other than ever before?

Unity and oneness are possible, Ephesians 4:4 teaches us, not because of who we are, but because we are rooted in God's identity as *ONE body, ONE Spirit, and God's gifting of ONE hope that belongs to your call*.

Rooted in oneness doesn't make us all the same, thank goodness! But, perhaps like the *great convergence* of Jupiter and Saturn—not seen for nearly 400 years--that created a solstice light to start this winter season, in God we're committed to being drawn together to form a fuller light, so desperately needed in our world.

Prayer: *Make us One in You, a fuller light to dispel despair and divisions. Amen.*

Monday, January 25, 2021

Where Can I Find Hope?

Rev. Dr. Tim Bonner

We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thess. 1:3 (NIV)

Before Georgia Avenue Baptist Church called me as Pastor, their search process took nearly fifteen months after I submitted my resume. I got discouraged when I didn't hear from the search committee for several months. I tried to wait patiently. God helped me to endure because I had hope.

Believers in the Thessalonian church endured persecution from Jews who wanted to eliminate Christianity, yet they kept hope because they believed Jesus would give them a better future. The Apostle Paul praised them for *continually* doing the work of the church and not losing hope.

I can relate to the Thessalonian believers' desire not to lose hope. We are still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of us is enduring and hoping today for many things—a coronavirus vaccine, government restrictions to be lifted, no travel limitations, our churches to be fully open...life to return to *normal*.

Here are my suggestions to stay hopeful in all circumstances: 1) Remember what Jesus has done for you in the past. 2) Focus on what you can look forward to. 3) Limit your bad news intake and negative thoughts about what terrible things might happen. 4) Reflect on how Christ is blessing you now.

Prayer: *Dear God, as the hymn says, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness... on Christ, the solid Rock I stand." Help me to endure the present because Jesus gives me hope for the future. In His name I pray, Amen.*

Hope
CHANGES EVERYTHING

Tuesday, January 26, 2021

Hold Fast to Hope

Dr. Robert Perry

My child, eat honey, for it is good and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste. Know that wisdom is such to your soul; if you find it, you will find a future, and your hope will not be cut off. - Proverbs 24:13-14 NRSV

The message of Proverbs is to provide meaningful thoughts and expressions that we may look to in order to give us strength and purpose. Within these two verses, we find the depth and breadth of God's care. First we are offered something wonderful to eat in the drippings of the honeycomb, a sweet delight that brings us joy as we consume what is offered to us. I am reminded of the manna that the Israelites enjoyed in the wilderness. God takes care of God's own. Verse 14 moves us to a new understanding of our relationship with God. Wisdom is the gift of God's own self. The world is in turmoil and filled with trouble. We are even told that we must prepare for a dark winter to come. It is easy to fear and to be uncertain about our future. But we are not alone. God continues to beckon to us to open our minds and hearts to the wisdom that is found in knowing the presence of the holy. True wisdom is found in trusting that God is always reaching out to us.

In this time of COVID-19 we struggle about the why of it all. We want it to be over and it will. The wisdom of God has provided caregivers, medical experts, and scientists to lead us to treatments and vaccines, a way to move beyond the current day. Our wisdom is in knowing whom to trust. God has provided us a host of people who are in the process of bringing wholeness to us all.

One of my favorite hymns is *Blessed Assurance*.

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine O what a foretaste of glory divine.
Heir of salvation, purchase of God Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood*

I love the way the music lifts my spirit. The words point me toward God and a hope-filled future. Belief in God is the beginning of all wisdom. I sing the hymn and I gain a glimpse of the goodness to come. God is with us, God blesses us and in God there is hope. Trust in God and trust in the goodness and blessings to come your way.

Prayer: *Make sure you test positive for faith. Keep your distance from doubt, and isolate yourself from fear. Trust in God through it all. Amen*

Wednesday, January 27, 2021

Beyond the Obvious

Aggie Eastham

Your life will be brighter than the noonday. Any darkness will be as bright as morning. You will have courage because you will have hope. You will be protected and will rest in safety. You will lay down unafraid. And many will look to you for help.
Job 11:17-19 (New Living Translation Study Bible)

As if living through a worldwide pandemic wasn't enough, I had to find a wet floor to slip on and fracture my patella! Beyond the obvious need for surgery, to wear a full knee brace, to endure physical therapy and doctor visits, and, of course, not to walk on a wet floor, what are you trying to show me Lord?

Once I let go of my concerns and fears, the Holy Spirit began to guide me in a deeper understanding of where my hope and security are found, just as Job went through such devastating loss and yet kept his trust in God. Grasping what it truly meant to lean on Him to get me through this time of loss of independence became clearer. Through Him bright everlasting life, beginning here and now, was mine. He was healing, protecting and helping me to rest each day and night unafraid. He provided me with the security of my husband, family and friends, food and shelter. He also showed me that I can do with fewer things, like eating out in restaurants and fewer activities, like playing games in the party room. This gave me more precious time to rest in Him and share my experience with others.

Prayer: Dear Lord, when circumstances surrounding me tend to fill my days with darkness, help me to remember that my hope is in you and in your promise to always be with me and guide me no matter what, in Jesus' name. Amen



Thursday, January 28, 2021

Called to be Patient

Bonnie Bonner

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Romans 8:24-25 (NIV)

Sure, I can write a devotion about the hope of salvation. But no, I have to write about waiting with patience! When I compare my behaviors to the fruits of the Spirit that the Apostle Paul describes in Galatians 5:22-23, I have to admit that my lack of patience is a major weakness.

Several years ago, my husband and I stopped at a local office supply store on the way home from church to pick up a large wall calendar. He had received an email stating that it was available. When we got there, the lines were all long, no one knew anything about the order, and the calendar could not be located. I wanted to complain! Why did he get an email if it's not here? Why are your lines so long? We were dressed in our Sunday best, so the other customers might assume we just left church, plus the order was in our church's name.

I did not display impatient behavior, because I did not want others to see a Christian behaving poorly. But I should always be a good example, even when I am wearing jeans and a sweatshirt and no one knows I am a follower of Christ. God calls me to wait patiently, whether it is a long line at Giant, a traffic jam on I-270, or waiting for life to return to normal after this pandemic.

Prayer: *Dear God, give me the strength to be patient in all circumstances. Help me to always be aware of how my behavior may affect others and strive to be a Christian role model.*
Amen



HOPE AND PATIENCE
GO TOGETHER

Friday, January 29, 2021

Angels Among Us

Bill Pailen

*Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
I Corinthians 13:6-7 (NIV)*

There is a song by Don Goodman and Becky Hobbs called *Angels Among Us*. The lyrics are
Oh, I believe there are angels among us.

*Sent down from somewhere up above. They come to you and me in our darkest hours
To show us how to live
To teach us how to give
To guide us with a light of love.*

I also believe there are angels among us. They are kind neighbors inspired by God to bring hope and to help those in our community who are most in need or most susceptible to the economic, health, isolation, and other ravages of the pandemic.

I have seen neighbors making and delivering masks to protect strangers from the spread of the virus. I know people who are preparing food and collecting clothing for others who are in financial need. I have relatives who provide aid as needed to their elderly neighbors. I have received offers from people who want to participate in our choir designed to help provide persons with Alzheimer's and dementia find social outlets through singing. Many medical providers risk their lives to help COVID-infected patients. Others provide no-cost medical services through virtual consultations. Countless workers make deliveries, provide transportation, or help the rest of us through our day.

Groups are finding creative ways to celebrate each other safely through Zoom birthday parties and other celebrations. Graduating seniors and departing neighbors have been saluted by their friends who conducted drive-by-and-wave events.

All these are evidence of God's angels among us. Let us give thanks for the angels in our church and community. They bring hope that sustains us through difficult times and gives us strength to persevere.

And we can all be God's angels. A smile, phone call, or other act of concern, kindness or generosity can bring God's blessings to someone in need. And by bringing the light of God's love and hope to others, we just may find that the light reflects back on us as well.

A prayer on www.ChristiansTT.com reads: *Father, I know that I am a special person, recreated in Christ Jesus, that I will do the great things that You have prepared for me. I pray that as I continue in my walk with You, I will also be a blessing to those I meet today.*

Saturday, January 30, 2021

God Is My Safe Room

Kevin Clemens

You are my refuge and my shield, I have put hope in your word. - Psalm 119:114 (ESV)

The Book of Psalms, the ancient hymnal of Israel, gives a magnificent picture of reality. The psalmists wrote incredibly honest and beautiful songs about their challenges and triumphs. The writer of Psalm 119 lived under a lot of pressure. The writer became strong and resilient because he placed his faith in the Word of God and meditated on it day and night. Here is how I rose above challenges early in my career and found peace.

I grew up in a middle class family and there were many times my *safe room* was a good hiding place for strength, secrecy, and reliability. I worked hard in academic studies and music performance at the high-school and university levels. At the same time, I had part-time employment at a local supermarket and played the organ in church in order to pay tuitions, lesson fees, books, housing, etc. I never had the benefit of government programs. My parents were very supportive of me and my brothers and sister, but did not have the means financially to help me.

When I finished my university education after a successful student teaching (music grades K-12) I found out all was not easy in gaining employment. There were times I suffered in secret due to disappointments. These disappointments came from applying for jobs in the public sector. I was told many times, I was well qualified for the job, but we have quotas to fill in this school district. In fact one superintendent told me “a Catholic white male is not what we had in mind.” Through these disappointments, I turned to the Psalms for guidance. Like King David, I was facing a battle and needed cover and shield. My shield was God’s protection which supplied grace, strength and comfort. With God’s Word in my heart, I knew I would eventually get that next job or position that came along in the music field. After a few more interviews and disappointments, I was hired as an elementary music teacher, teaching vocal and instrumental. Now I can look back and through using God as my *safe room* I found peace in my life. I continually go to my *safe room* when other disappointments present themselves. God’s Word has sustained me all these years as I enter retirement age.

When we suffer disappointments in life, remember to turn to Psalm 119 and highlight verse 114. This sweet and wonderful song reminds us that the world is seeking a secure *safe room* and through prayer, the Holy Spirit will sustain us.

Prayer: *Almighty God, I know that you will not disappoint me in your word and promises. As a safe room, help me to live in you day by day. Thank you for being my shield and defender so that I may turn to your Son, Jesus Christ, upon any temptation. Your word of truth is completely unfailing. Give me patience to endure the disappointments of life. I ask this through Christ my Lord. Amen.*

Sunday, January 31, 2021

The Hope of Glory

Rev. Raymond Ortman

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Colossians 1:27 (NIV)

A group of scouts set out from a city on a troop camping trip in the deep woods. That weekend the mosquitos were fierce. In fact, the scouts had to hide under blankets to avoid being bitten. One of the group peeped out and saw some lightning bugs for the very first time ever. He shouted to the others: "Hey! We might as well just give up. Those giant mosquitos are now coming for us with flashlights!"

We have all had those occasions when life seems to scare and overwhelm us. Even though we have managed as best we can, the challenges of today and the months of COVID-19 and unrest have been daunting. Indeed, upon arising in the morning, we perhaps have been tempted to say, "Good God, it's morning" rather than "Good morning, God!" Hope seems to sometimes be in very short supply.

Saint Paul in his letter to the Colossians depicts the abundance of Hope that we have in Christ. None of us know what tomorrow will bring. But we do know that Christ holds tomorrow in His hands. He is our Hope and Salvation.

The old hymn says it well: "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness..... On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand. All other ground is sinking sand." (Edward More/John B. Dykes) Amen.

Prayer: *Lord God, help me never to lose my Hope or my Faith in You. Amen.*

Christ In You The Hope Of
YOU Glory

KEEP HOPE ALIVE IN 2021



When your world begins to spin out of control, here are seven things you can do to keep hope in 2021, especially in these uncertain times.

1. Be kind to yourself.

Think about what you need most, and then do it. Is it a cup of tea, a brisk walk, some downtime, quiet music, a little rest, or reading inspirational literature? Whatever it is, grant yourself permission to do it, even for just a few minutes. These small moments accumulate and transform the texture of our days.

2. Create a 5-minute silence ritual every day.

Light a candle and pray, meditate or reflect on God's goodness and grace. This time of silent reflection is nurturing and healing. This may be the one time of day when you feel connected to your own soul and your Creator.

3. Curtail your intake of the news.

Oversaturation with news can be detrimental to emotional health. If you read the newspaper in the morning, let that be enough. You don't need to turn on the TV or radio before bed. Consider putting a complete moratorium on news at least once a week. Anything you missed will be there tomorrow.

4. Every morning, afternoon and night, take a 60 second break to look heavenward, breathe deeply and offer thanks.

Even though the world has its problems, even though you have your own individual problems, the sun still rises in the sky each morning, and we're awake and alive when we get out of bed. Let the sky be a touchstone to hope. Think of other people around the world as you look at the sky, and know that we are not alone in our situation.

5. Express love tangibly.

Hugs, words, notes, acts of kindness -- be indiscriminately generous with all of them. Surprise a friend with a phone call. Skype or Zoom with your grandchildren. If you like how the clerk treated you in the store, thank him or her. Leave your friend and family small notes expressing gratitude for kind acts. Doing all of this adds warmth and positive energy to our lives and the lives of people around us. It's also very comforting both to the giver and receiver of each loving act.

6. Reach out beyond your normal scope.

Each time we make a difference in the lives of others, we create hope in ourselves. By reaching out to someone in need, be it your neighbor, those who are hungry, or people in a homeless shelter, we add a little hope to the world. Our accumulated gestures of care and compassion will ultimately transform our lives and the lives of others.

7. Learn to relax and add these simple things to your daily routine.

Put on your favorite song and sing along, reread your favorite book, begin each day with your favorite music, laugh out loud, dance as if no one is watching, count your blessings and give thanks to God!

If you incorporate some of these into your daily routine, you just may find that whatever you are experiencing in 2021, you will create a circle of hope that will reach far beyond yourself.





We Live By Hope by Steve Garnaas-Holmes

Hope is not wishing: no, not that tentative.

Hope is not wanting: no, not that self-centered.

Hope is trust in grace unseen,
already there, already unfolding,
the seed beneath, the child within.

Hope is surrender to a greater movement,
acceptance that I am the thread
and the tapestry is vast.

Hope is confidence in spring as winter approaches.

Hope is belief in the fullness of time.

Hope is knowing in death and suffering
there is a healing presence.

Hope is patience, letting grace take its time.

Hope is planting ourselves in a future
that exists only in our acting: Such as
raising children, loving enemies, planting trees.

Hope is awaiting the One Who is Here.