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Hebrews 6:10-12, 16-19  
Theme: Hope  
August 30, 2020

In our ninth week of my first ten sermons, we are going to talk about hope. Last week, we spoke about Grace through the story of Ephesians and how John Wesley's three forms of grace are expressed through our Methodist theology. I shared with you part of my story with my father and our journey through learning grace together. This week we will look at the theme of hope and how it is illustrated in Hebrews 6.

Before we jump into our scripture for the week, we must ask a couple questions. "What is hope? & why is hope important?" If you look at the Merriam-Webster definition of hope, then hope is understood as both a verb and a noun. Both definitions have a similar way in which they define hope. The famous dictionary describes hope as, "a desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment; expectation of fulfillment or success; to cherish a desire with anticipation : to want something to happen or be true" (Merriam Webster Online Dictionary). Both definitions leave a little to be desired, but in the synonyms for hope, trust is used in both uses of hope as a verb and a noun.

As a verb, hope is described as a transitive verb. I don't know about you, but it has been a while since I have studied English grammar and I looked up the definition of a transitive verb to make sure I had a firm grasp on what that means. Transitive verbs help the reader understand a transition is being made, a transfer is taking place between the subject and their objective, and transitive verbs require an object. In a way, transitive verbs help provide a deeper connection to the subject and the object they are referring to. In other words, hope is a transition and a fluid change, not a static, immovable process.

(<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/transitive-and-intransitive-verbs/>)

If we understand hope as a form of trust and a transition into what we are looking for, then how does this help us understand why hope is important? Hope is important because not only is it a self-motivator for us to do something in our lives, but hope inspires others to participate in this transition together. Hope is a way to learn to trust ourselves and to trust our community. In our first week together, we talked about the "Greatest Commandment" in Matthew 22:37-40. In a more modern context, Jesus uses the greatest commandment to say, "Love yourself because God is in you, and love your neighbor because God is in them. Trust in this love with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength." In order to participate in the love of the Gospel, we must learn to trust one another and build those relationships with a foundation of hope and love for one another.

One of the hymns I considered using for worship this week is UMH 374 *Standing on the Promises*. The second verse goes like this, "Standing on the promises that cannot fail, when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, by the living Word of God I shall prevail, standing on the promises of God" This verse talks about hope by trusting the promises kept by God will not fail and that the Word of God will prevail as we stand in the promises of God. It does not say there will be no heartache and life will be perfect! It does not say having hope will bring you no pain or all things in your life will happen exactly the way you want! Yet, the verse does ask us to be mindful of our fears and our doubts and to remind ourselves that God is with us as we stand in the promises of God.

In Mark 4:35-41, Jesus calms the storm of the sea as the disciples cower in fear. No one blames the disciples for being fearful for their lives, but Jesus calmly steps out in the boat and says, "Peace! Be still!" Jesus has hope and encourages the disciples to have hope in that all will be well even in the midst of their calamity. In Matthew 26, when Jesus faces his impending death at his arrest, one of the disciples draws his sword and cuts the ear off one of the guards. Instead of cheering his defender on, Jesus rebukes him saying, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). Jesus asks his disciples, his friends, to trust him and have hope that there is something

more here to see than just their fear of their friend's arrest and death. Jesus encourages us to have hope and to be hopeful even in our most trying times and difficult moments in life.

The Book of Hebrews is all about our new faith as Christians. It speaks about Jesus, it speaks about how the ancestors of our faith overcame what seemed like insurmountable obstacles, and it speaks about how our faith in Christ and our faith in each other is the new covenant of life. In Hebrews 6:11, it expresses hope in saying, "And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end" (Hebrews 6:11). This full assurance of hope is talked about in the book of Hebrews in a couple ways. In Hebrews 10:22, full assurance of hope is a reminder of our baptism and how our baptism was a way to renew ourselves and acknowledge the love of Christ is in our lives. Our assurance of hope is that God will be with us in our pursuit of the Kingdom of God and through our trials and tribulations, God will be with us as we practice our social holiness in the world, and God is with us in the midst of our fears and failures as our world is unraveled before our eyes. Hope is knowing Jesus will not fail us and will be with us until the end of our days.

The remainder of the verses we read today speak about a covenant we share with God. Verses 16 and 17 read, "16 Human beings, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all dispute. 17 In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath" This is a promise we hold and make with God and God's love that will see us through whatever situation we face. Lastly, hope is described in a unique way at the end of this section of chapter 6. Verse 19 says, "We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain," The story of Mark and Jesus calming the storm comes to mind with this reference to an anchor and that an anchor is used to keep a ship grounded and steady. Our hope is the anchor that keeps us grounded in our fear and our doubts knowing that God is our refuge and our strength. The reference to the inner shrine

is a reminder of the Temple. In the inner shrine, which only the high priest could enter, the inner shrine is where God lived. It was the also called the holy of holies. This means God lives in our fears, our doubts, and our failures because God is with us. Our God calls us to be hope in the world because our God is greater than our fears, failures, and sins we have created in our greed and injustice.

This has been a challenging week to be hopeful. Not only do Covid deaths continue to take place in our nation and Covid cases continue to rise in our county, but we must deal with the unrest in Kenosha, WI. Jacob Blake, a man now paralyzed and currently chained to his hospital bed for trying to break up a fight in his community, and Kyle Rittenhouse, a young man who blinded by his hatred took the lives of two protestors. I was not there and I did not feel the emotions of the officers, the protestors, the counter-protestors, or of Jacob Blake, but we grieve as we hear our nation lamenting in deep, traumatizing pain.

What will come next? Can we even talk to one another anymore? Who will die next? These were all questions that continue to swirl in my mind as I try to make sense out of all of this pain and grief I see in Kenosha. I believe what we have lost is a sense of hope and trust in one another. Black and brown people have faced terrible atrocities in the name of our God, our nation, and our institutions as they simply try and exist in the same world we all know and love. Officers have lost the trust of their communities and communities have the lost the trust of their officers as we continue to yell at one another instead of speak and listen. Government officials and politicians use moments like this to prop up themselves and to instill fears in their base by talking about the dangerous, "other people," coming to get you. Have we lost all hope in one another? Have we lost all trust in our fellow humans?

My answer, or at minimum, my hope, is no. I confess it is not a confident no or a no that is rooted in the assurance that all will be okay, but I still say Love is the answer and Hope is still attainable. I still have hope because my God delivered the enslaved people out of Egypt to the Promised Land. I still have hope because my God sent his son to teach the world love, peace, and joy. I still have hope

because even in the midst of a global pandemic my God continues to connect people and show us new ways of being in relationship to one another. It may not be a strong hope, it may not be a fervent hope that inspires a new generation to take up their swords of the Spirit in our ongoing fights of injustice, but I still have hope that God will deliver us from this pain, this grief, and this confusion on where to go and what to do.

I conclude with a couple thoughts. A video of the Kenosha protests went viral after the murders took place. It was a video of a right wing militia member and Black Lives Matters protestors talking and listening to one another. They were agreeing with one another that both of their lives needed hope. Both of their lives needed justice. Both of their lives needed the assurance that their families would be safe and their communities would remain safely intact. It was a moment of shared connection and the Divine reminding us, "God is within you and God is within me." I hope we are able to see God in Republicans and Democrats as we continue with a polarizing election. I hope we continue to see God in the lives of Black Lives Matters protestors and counter-protestors who may not agree on some issues but can still agree all humans deserve safe communities. I hope we are able to see God in each other as we continue step-by-step, hand-in-hand as we journey through this global pandemic together.

In closing, I was lucky enough to participate in a class in college about musical theater. At the end of the class, we performed various acts and scenes from play of Rodgers and Hammerstein. We ended our performance with a song that contained the theme of Hope that I use in my own fear and at funerals with people in grief. These are the lyrics from the musical, *Carousel*, from the song, *You'll Never Walk Alone*. "When you walk through a storm hold your head up high, and don't be afraid of the dark. At the end of the storm, there's a golden sky and the sweet silver song of a lark. Walk on through the wind walk on through the rain though your dreams be tossed and blown. Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart and you'll never walk alone. You'll never walk alone!" May you remember the words of Jesus in your moments of fear and despair, "Peace! Be Still!" (Mark 4:39).