

“What Jesus Says to a Troubled Church: Look for the Morning Star”

“Here’s something that intrigues me.... how some people use the word hope.

Have you ever noticed that some people use the word hope to avoid committing themselves.

Are you coming to church tomorrow morning? Will I see you at church?

“Well, I hope to.”

What does that mean?

Are you going see them at church?

Probably not.

Anytime someone tells me they hope they're going to do something, I'm not counting on it. I'm counting against it.

The Bible means something different when it talks about hope.

Among intriguing book titles is surely this one, by Madeline Blais:

In These Girls, Hope Is A Muscle.

It's the story of a high school girl's basketball team from Amherst, Mass. and their quest for a state championship.

The book follows the girls through the season of ups and downs and ultimate triumph.

In These Girls, Hope Is A Muscle.....

You get that don't you.....hope is not a passive, wishy washy, wishful thinking.

Hope is active, as tough as muscle....it is something you do.

There are a lot of girls....women in this church who have muscles of hope like a body builder.

So many of you doing hope and have been for a long time....I just cant get over it...

And there's one among you named Hope, and in this sense she is rightly named, isnt she?

You know what Paul says about hope?

Romans 5?

Suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us.

My high school football coach Chuck Lenning used to say this.

He'd call us together at what we thought was the end of the second August two a day practice...

Good....we're going in.

Good practice today boys....and we could go in right now...but how much do you want to win?

I know you're hot...I know you're tired....but it's the fourth quarter....its like the 4th quarter now...the score is tied...who's gonna win this game? Are you gonna win/ YES SIR!

If you really want to win, we're gonna run one more set of suicide wind sprints...we'll suffer now...but it will make you tougher than your opponent and we will own the 4th quarter.

So run your sprints....and hold up four fingers.

We'd do that.

I wanted to hold up five....as in take five, boys.

We held up 4, we suffered, it produced character....and character produced hope.

Is that right? Does it work that way?

Thyatira was a fourth quarter church.

That's what Jesus said to them.

Did you hear it?

I like the way Eugene Peterson has it in the message:

"I see the list of everything you're doing for me....IMPRESSIVE !

The love, the faith, the service, the persistence and endurance.....YES!
VERY IMPRESSIVE.

And you get better and better at it ...

You hear what he's saying?

You're a 4th quarter church.

You get better as the game goes on....

You just keep on keeping on, and if you do, you'll see the morningstar of hope rise before you.

You are like Thyratira, you know.

Jesus say to you what he said to them..I see your love.....your agape love...

I visited in nursing homes this week....it was a moving thing....time after time, I had people tell me about someone who had been to see them, one person said to me, The Elders and Deacons of our church have been so good to me....Another talked about Presbyterian Women coming...

Who notices when someone visits a nursing home?

I know One who does....these beloved ones matter greatly to him...the world may have put them on the shelf...but these are among the most important folks in this church from God's perspective...and when you love them...that's agape you love as God loves.

And Jesus says, "I see your serving."

Diakonian....is the Greek word....we get the word Deacon and Diaconate from it.

Service. I drove up one afternoon this week and there was Buck Tate hedge clipper in hand, finishing up a bush out back.

Less than a week away from hernia repair surgery and he was out there trimming bushes, bending over, gathering up the clippings...

You know what I felt like?

I felt like holding up 4 fingers....suffering produces endurance, endurance character, character, hope.

Jesus says, I see your love, I see your service..

And faith....I see your faith....says Jesus, and surely he sees yours.

Why some of you are every bit as excited about what God is doing in this place as the woman at the well in Samaria who Jesus met....

He woke up her hope and it sent her scurrying back to town to tell everyone she met...come and see...come and see

Did you know that 80 % of people when you ask them why they came to a church, said that someone they knew said that to them....come and see.

Jesus says....I see your faith...your service ...your love...the straining muscle of your hope

Let me tell you something....when the muscle of hope starts working....Watch out!

Saint Andrews Episcopal Church in Haw River is nestled between a trailer park and a plastics fabrication plant.

Behind their red door they have no narthex, no choir loft, no choir.

Once the largest producer of corduroy in the world, the Haw River mill is shuttered.

The high school closed.

The town is poor.

On any given Sunday, the church with less than 70 members will see 30 of them at church.

But don't even begin feeling sorry for them.

Faced with extinction, they are a testimony to what happens when the muscle of hope awakens.

Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, their fellowship hall is filled with children being tutored by church volunteers.

If you look out back, a big patch their pretty green lawn is plowed up so that 10 poor families can raise a garden.

Walk in the kitchen, member Sharon Ranew is elbow deep in flour, sugar, eggs, and frosting.

At the end of her work is a cake with cream cheese icing, sprinkles, and HAPPY BIRTHDAY! inscribed across the top.

She makes a hundred cakes a year, one for every foster child in Alamance County. That's her mission

Ask Norine MacArthur, 72, retired, tutoring Jorge for his citizenship test what's going on here...

And here's what she will tell you.

"It's all about hope, all about faith, all about love."

You do what God asks you to do....and you wait.

Suffering produces endurance, endurance, character, character hope....and hope does not disappoint us.....

It does not disappoint us, even when things do not turn out as we hope.

Tanya was a capable, ambitious, hardworking young woman.

She hitched her wagon to the star of success, mortgaged to the hilt, she fastened her hopes on achieving and on having it all.

I married her and her husband.

I did not see them again for some years.

When she came back to church, it was with the news that she had been diagnosed with liver cancer.

Things did not look good.

She attacked her disease the way she had her career.

A team of supporters with t shirts.....exhaustive research for the best options for treatment, and an awakening hope in the power of God to make her well.

"I'm praying for my miracle," she said....every time I saw her...and I told her that I would, too. And I did. Others did.

She grew worse...not better.

The cancer did what cancer does. The chemo nearly killed her.

Finally, she couldn't get out of bed.

She read her Bible...James 5....you know that? are any of you sick? Send for the elders that they might pray for you.

We did....anointing her with oil.

Still she talked about her miracle.

She sent word the next day that she wanted to see me.
"I got my miracle," she said.

"I had a dream last night. I was in a garden, and Jesus came to me. His face was so kind....and he spoke to me. He called my name. The peace I felt was amazing. I know that everything is going to be alright."

I said, "There's a song about that, you know."

No...what song...

I come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses....and the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses....

"And he walks with me and he talks with me and he tells he I am his own...and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known."

I have my miracle....she said.

And then she died.

Was she right?

Every human hope gives way to dust.
But out of the dust, out of the darkness, a star rises....a star of hope.....not
Venus, not Mercury, but the one who ends this book, ends the Bible by
saying, "I am the bright Morning Star"

All our muscles of hope will not save us, but he will. To prepare to receive
this saving hope, we'll sing this truth:

**There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody;
There's a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope to you and me.
In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.**

We get a glimpse of it here at the table.

I can't wait to see how it ends.