5-20/21-17 Rev. Amy Haines

1 Peter 3:13-22 Grounded in Hope

..One afternoon a man arrived late at a little league baseball game. So he asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, "Eighteen to nothing--we're behind."

"Boy," said the man, "I'll bet you're discouraged."

"Why should I be discouraged?" replied the little boy. "We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!"

-adapted, Source Unknown. Sermonillustrations.com:hope

Each week hope is present on every ball diamond, soccer field, lacrosse field and football stadium around the world. As I watch my son Timothy’s team in little league, I see hope present each time a child is up to bat, when they expect to get on base, either through a hit or a walk. If one time they strike out, they have hope that the next at bat will be different. Sometimes it is, and sometimes it isn’t. Some games are won and some games are lost. Yet sports players and sports fans rarely give up hope that the next inning, the next game, or even the next year will be different. Can I get an “amen” from any Browns fans here today?

As Christians, we live in the tension between now and not yet, between our present reality and our future promise, between life in this world and eternal life. We are called to be people grounded in hope, living with a feeling of expectation that God is still moving in and through and among us regardless of our present circumstances. We are called to be people grounded in hope, desiring a better outcome for the future that begins with our love of God and love of neighbor in the here and now. We are called to be people grounded in hope, anticipating that as we live by faith we will grow deeper in our relationship with God, even if nothing else changes around us.

Today we hear words of hopeful encouragement from the letter of 1 Peter, a letter originally written to the scattered, struggling, marginalized and persecuted communities of faith that were the first century church. These early Christians faced physical and verbal persecution because they chose to act and think differently than the world around them. They swore allegiance to Jesus rather than the Emperor. They believed in only one God, whom they could not see, rather than worship the many Temple gods, whose idols they could touch and whose priests they could bribe. They broke down the boundaries of polite society when they met together as a faith community for worship and prayer, for they gathered together rich and poor, men and women, businessman and servant. They sought to live by love and forgiveness

rather than vengeance and violence, and were often ridiculed and abused for such contrary notions.

1 Peter reminds us time and again that the early church was suffering because of their faith in a crucified and risen Savior and Lord. Yet in the midst of such suffering, they were called to live by hope, by faith, by love, remembering who and whose they were, called to stand firm in their faithful witness.

While you and I may be more ridiculed than persecuted, dismissed more often than challenged,

these words also reach out to us today, reminding us who and whose we are, calling us to stand firm in our faithful witness, encouraging us as well to live by hope, by faith, by love.

As I read through today’s passage from the first century church, it reminded me of Bishop Reuben Job’s 21st century summary of John Wesley’s 18th century General Rules for the people called Methodists:

Do No Harm

Do Good

Stay in Love with God

Those rules remind us how to love God and love neighbor.

1 Peter, however, reminds us how to live for God as we interact with our neighbors. He encourages us:

Do Not Fear

Do Good

Be ready to speak of your faith in Jesus

**Do not fear**

Turn on the evening news, or read through the day’s headlines, and there is much to fear in our world today. Wars and rumors of wars. Financial uncertainty. The loss of civility. The growing distrust of institutions. Fake news and the erosion of truth. The heroin epidemic.

Yet even deeper are the fears within us—fear of change, fear of the unknown, fear of failure,

fear of loss, fear of the other—and these fears tear at the fabric of our relationships with God and with one another, for often they paralyze us into inaction, holding us back from doing what we know we ought to be doing.

1 Peter reminds us do not fear, do not be intimidated, do not be terrified—of other people.

For they will make fun of us, they will misunderstand us, they will ridicule and even reject us—for we are different, those of us who follow Jesus.

We can let our fear hold us back, keeping us captive from living out the life God intends for us to live, or we can live by faith, trusting in Christ at the center of our lives, no matter what storms may swirl around us.

As Romans 8 reminds us, (31-32, 38-39)

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?

…For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

…“British clergyman G. Campbell Morgan told the story of a man whose shop had been burned in the great Chicago fire of 1871. The man arrived at the ruins the next morning carrying a table. He set up the table in the midst of the charred debris, and above it placed a sign that said, ‘Everything lost except wife, children and hope. Business will be resumed as usual tomorrow morning.’

John Maxwell then writes in his book *Sometimes You Win, Sometimes You Learn:* “That man’s response is one that I truly admire. After such a heavy loss, where did he get his hope? From his circumstances? Certainly not. From good timing? No. From other victims of the fire? There’s no indication that he did. How many others faced the future with such positive determination? If this man saw a bright future for himself and his family, it was because he made a choice to have hope.

“Hope is in the DNA of men and women who learn from their losses. When times are tough, they choose hope, knowing that it will motivate them to learn and turn them from victims into victors.” -as told by John Maxwell, quoted in Leadership Wired newsletter, on preaching.com

When we live by hope, hope will triumph over fear. Hope will move our focus from what we fear to our faith in Christ. And when we focus on Christ, we can move forward in mission and ministry.

**Do good**

For as followers of Christ, we are called to do good—in all times, in all ways, in all places.

As today’s passage begins, “Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?”

“If with heart and soul you’re doing good, do you think you can be stopped?”

Yet, those who don’t like what we do will try and stop us. Those who don’t want to see us living Christ-like lives will try and derail us. They will push our buttons, find our weaknesses, and try to get us to slip up, act out, and react in very unChrist-like ways. And at times, they will succeed.

So 1 Peter calls us today to do good. Do not repay evil with evil. Maintain a clear conscience.

Control how we respond.

We cannot control evil in the midst of suffering. We cannot control the slander and lies other people will say about us. We cannot control how someone else will react to our story of faith.

We can only control ourselves.

Have you ever read someone’s Facebook post or reply and thought to yourself wow, did they really just say that? Or did they really just post that? In the virtual world of Facebook or email or Twitter, it is easy to quickly make a comment that one would never dare say face to face with that same person. Yet when our comments or posts or reactions put someone down, demean or judge, they do more harm than good. And when we who profess faith in Christ post snarky or mean-spirited or nasty comments, it only reinforces the world’s negative view of Christians as hypocritical and judgmental.

We must control how we respond—in the real world as well as in the world of social media.

How does what we say and what we do honor the one in whose name we live and move and have our being? Does our walk match our talk?

1 Peter encourages us, “Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil.” (16b-17)

**Be ready to speak of your faith in Jesus**

While what we **do** is to show our faith in Christ Jesus, we also are always to be ready to **say** why we live the way we live.

If I were to sit down with you at lunch today and ask you, “Why are you a Christian?” and “What difference does it make in your life that you are a Christ-follower?” would you be able to answer those two questions? Would you be able to share where the hope that is within you comes from?

The NRSV translates v. 15 to say, “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.”

This word “defense” comes from the Greek *apologia,* or “apology”, a reasoned, well-thought-out explanation, like an attorney presenting evidence in a court of law.

--Pastor Scott Hoezee goes on to say,

“Peter imports this word from the legal world into the world of the everyday, saying that as Christians we need to be ready with a solid apology for our hope in case anyone asks. Even as a lawyer would not walk into court without having done his homework, so we should not walk out into the marketplaces, factories, or offices of life without having devoted some time to thinking through our faith.” -- Scott Hoezee cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/easter-6a

What we say, isn’t about having all of the right answers, or knowing all of the key Bible verses by heart. Rather, our apology is more about being faithful to describing how our story aligns with God’s story, and how that makes a difference in our lives.

1 Peter also goes on to remind us that the **way** we share our faith story is as important as **what** we share. We are called to make our defense with gentleness and reverence. Our story is not a holy 2x4. We do not browbeat others into believing what is true for us. We do not force others to have an experience of faith like our experience. Rather our story is a humble sharing of how Christ’s compassion and care has changed our lives. We need to be able to proclaim it in a way that honors the one who gives us hope.

On August 9, 2015, Frank Gifford died sitting in his chair at home, waiting to go to church. Frank and his wife, Kathie Lee were no strangers to the TV camera. While Kathie Lee has been a co-host of the NBC Today Show for several years, Frank was an ABC sports broadcaster for 26 years after he retired from the NFL. Yet their faith was often not something they spoke of publicly.

On her first day back to work after Frank’s death, however, Kathie Lee shared a tribute about her husband’s faith in God. Kathie Lee said Frank “strayed from his faith on occasion, but his faith never left him.”

She added: “His world got smaller as his God got bigger. And he would want you to know that he died in complete peace. He knew every sin he had ever committed was forgiven. He had the hope he would be with the Lord and one day we would be with him as well.”

Though Frank had a room filled with trophies and awards, including the bust he received when he was inducted in the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1977, in the last few years of his life the first item he would show visitors was not his trophies, but a small stone sitting among them.

Several years back Frank and Kathie Lee had visited Israel, where Frank had taken several small stones from the brook of Elah, where David had chosen his five small stones for his sling that brought down the giant Goliath. Their guide Ray had told them that the miracle in that story wasn’t that David slew the giant but that David had faith in God to believe a young shepherd boy could defeat the Philistine champion with that stone. That experience gave Frank a new perspective on life.

When their daughter Cassidy graduated from high school, Frank gave her a stone from the Brook of Elah and said: “Cass, where are you going to throw your stone for the Kingdom of God.” He did the same thing for their son Cody who graduated from college two weeks later.

As Kathie concluded her tribute to Frank, she suggested to her audience that if they need hope and peace, they might consider Christianity. She was not afraid that day to speak of the hope of Jesus. -adapted from Dean Smith on opentheword.org 8-19-15

and Mike Shannon on preaching.com 11-1-15?

While a stone may seem like a strange graduation gift, consider the hope and faith that goes with that stone. The stone was Frank’s way of sharing his faith with visitors as well as his own children.

It reminded him not to fear the future, but to live in ways that promote the kingdom of God in this world. Kathy was not afraid to speak of Frank’s faith in her tribute on national television, for in Christ was their firm foundation.

We, too, are called to live each day without fear, eager to do what is good, willing to speak of our faith in Jesus. We, too, are called to live grounded in hope.

No matter where we go in life—as graduates, as military families, as grandparents seeking to live closer to grandchildren, as individuals still seeking to find our way—may we live grounded in hope, knowing that God is with us, Christ goes before us, and the Holy Spirit seeks to guide us in all we do and say.

May it be so.