Where Do You Find Hope?

Jennifer Fry

Oct 12-13, 2019

Our scripture today is really part of a much larger story: the healing of the crippled beggar sets up Peter’s sermon to the crowd of witnesses, which starts in verse 11. Yet, contained in these 10 verses is a strong message of hope.

Let’s dissect our scripture just a bit: As Peter and John walked up to the temple, they saw some men carrying a crippled beggar to the gate. He was set outside what was assuredly a beautiful temple, at a gate named Beautiful. He was placed outside this gate --- not inside, not taken into the temple to worship, but left outside to beg. He represented those on the lowest rung of society – those who had nothing, had no choice but to beg for what they got, who may have been considered unworthy to enter not just the temple itself, but the grounds on which it stood. The temple itself represented the presence of God, sacrifice, and atonement from sin – and they left him outside to beg. The first part of the scripture doesn’t set up a very hopeful story, does it?

Did he have hope? Yes .. he had a material hope that these followers of Christ would be generous enough to share what little they had with him. But I think he’d lost hope of ever being healed, being cured, being normal. And then along came Peter and John. When Peter saw this man, he didn’t see just a beggar with no other way to sustain himself. No. He saw this man as what he was: a beloved child of God who deserved to know and understand the love of God. Perhaps a man who had lost his sense of hope in the love of God.

Who knows how many people walked by this man without really “seeing” him? But Peter saw not only a child of God, but an opportunity to demonstrate the amazing, healing power of God and restore hope not only to the lame man, but to all those going into the temple. When the man asked for money, Peter said, “Look at us!” I’ll bet the beggar was surprised, because he’d come to expect people to either pass by and ignore him, or pass by, toss some money at him, and keep going. The beggar looked up, hoping for a coin or two. Imagine his intense disappointment when Peter said, “I have no silver or gold”.

I imagine he was thinking, “then why are you bothering me? “ But then Peter said, “but what I have, I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.”

Then, Peter put down his hand, took the man’s hand in his own, and pulled him to his feet. His now strong feet and legs held him up as they had never done before. He walked and leapt for joy, entering the temple to worship with those who, just minutes before, had left him outside the temple because his lameness made him unworthy to worship. Imagine being one of those folks, or even one of the men who carried the lame man to the gate to beg. Imagine the hope that must have filled their hearts as they saw the healing power of Christ work, literally right before their eyes. Not a story that someone told them, but a true healing in their midst.

I’d like to tell you a story about a new friend. I met her a few weeks ago at a district event and after the first conversation with her, I knew God had put her in my path for a reason. She is you. She is me. She is an everyday person sitting in her church every Sunday, feeling called to do more. And all of a sudden, she realized her call was to lead a church – her own small church in a town not far from here. Without any lay training, she’s signed up to become a Licensed Local Pastor, and was introduced to her church recently as their new Pastor. She’s excited, scared, and hopeful. It’s been really cool to see. Here’s her story…

My friend is a mother of two, with a two year old granddaughter. Her husband is, quite literally, a cowboy .. and a pilot. When their son was 13 years old, they found out he was an alcoholic. They found out, because he’d traded his lunch that day for his first opioid and got caught. And they started down a path that would last 13.5 years, including multiple trips through rehab, and end in the overdose of their son, 2 years ago. He was homeless and no matter how much she begged, he would come home to visit, but not stay. He lived on the streets in Cincinnati and in Chicago, and he died in Chicago. She said the people who did funeral meals in her church called and asked about a service. My friend said there was a service in Chicago, but they weren’t planning one in their hometown.

They went to Chicago for what ended up being one of three services. And 300 people showed up. Let me say that again: 300 people showed up for a memorial service for an addict who overdosed. During that service, people kept coming up to them and introducing themselves. “Your son saved my life. He took me to my first AA or NA meeting.” Over and over again this theme presented itself. “Your son saved my life.” She told me they got back to the hotel that night and her husband said, “I am so..” and together, they said, “ashamed”. Ashamed because they could not see past the addiction to the amazing things their son was doing in the name of Christ. They felt that he’d done more for Christ in his short 26 years on earth, than they had in their lifetimes. They could not see the hope he brought to others, they could only see the addict. They’ve tried to continue his work, doing the things they can to help those in need, recently raising almost $6k at a silent auction in his name.

As sad and tragic as my friend’s story is, there is hope in the sadness and tragedy. There is hope in his death. Those people he helped see hope every day in their own lives and recognize that he brought hope back to them.

We live in what can arguably called a hopeless world. Drug addiction. Human trafficking. Murder. Mass shootings. Pornography. Child Abuse. The list is long and scary.

Yet, we’re reminded over and over again in the bible, that our hope in God will sustain us. The psalmist tells at least twice that our hope in God is paramount:

In Psalm 4:25, we’re asked: “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God”

In Psalm 31:24, we’re told: “Be strong and take heart all you who hope in the Lord.”

Isaiah is one of the most influential prophets to have lived. He prophesied about both destruction and redemption. In Isaiah 9:6, he gave us hope in the old testament 700 years before the birth of Jesus: “For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

I read a piece in a Guideposts recently about finding your hope in God in every situation. It was written by Norman Vincent Peale. He said, “Some people think hope is an emotion. “I’m feeling hopeful,” they say, but true hope is a discipline, a determination to believe in God’s reality and power, even when the world seems to be crashing down around you. That is the genius and the power of hope. It flies in the face of calamity, saying, “The world can do its worst to me. But still I will hope. Still I will know that this is the day the Lord has made, and He will take care of me. The key to surviving any challenge or crisis is hope. Hope that Jesus loves you. Hope that He is, right now, working out a solution for you. Hope that the future you place in His hands will be better than the present you hold in your own.”

Jeremiah, who, outside of Jesus, may be my favorite guy in the bible, was known to the be the “Weeping Prophet”. He whined; my gosh, could Jeremiah whine. But he was fearless in his belief and love in God, and in 29:11, he spoke the words that remind us daily that we are beloved children of God and that there is hope for us every hour of every day, though our love for Christ. “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Sarah and Abraham found hope in their faith in God. They knew they were well past child bearing years and yet, they continued to have faith in God that brought them hope that they would have children.

I think we often look to more secular things for hope. We look to our political leaders to provide hope for the future of our country. We look to the news media to provide hope that this isn’t such an awful world we live in. We look at our bank accounts for hope in our financial future.

We find hope in other places. We find hope in acts of kindness, in the slow recovery from illness. In the unconditional love of our families. Sometimes we find hope in the most mundane places. Have you ever stood in a check-out line at the grocery store and struck up a conversation with the person behind you? I’ve done that before and heard stories of healing or change that have only reinforced my faith and hope in Christ.

Think about the Woman at the Well. She was a Samaritan and she was awful to Jesus in the beginning, “Why should I, a Samaritan, give you, a Jew, water?” As they continued talking, he revealed her to what he knew about her life, that she’d had five husbands and was living with a sixth man to whom she was not married. She immediately understood he was a prophet and quickly understood Jesus to be the Messiah. She left her water jug and ran back to town to tell her story. Can you imagine the hope that was growing in her as she ran? And she took that hope, shared it with the villagers, and they ran to meet the Messiah, their hope growing with every step.

The faith that we have in our relationship with Jesus is what brings us the most sustaining hope for our lives and our futures. It is the hope that tells us that we are accepted, treasured, chosen, and loved by God. That we are forgiven by the blood shed on the cross by Jesus Christ.

When we have hope, we feel loved and valued, we know who we are without a doubt, we know our purpose, we don’t feel abandoned, and we see that our future is bright. That hope comes the faith we have in Jesus Christ, in the hope he gave us that day at Calvary.

Think about that day for a moment. The devastation those followers of Christ felt. For many, it was the end of their hope. But the disciples had heard Jesus predict his death at least nine times – and nine times they’d acted as if they hadn’t understood or believed it could happen. And yet, it did. Do you suppose at that point, in the back of their mind, there was a little niggling recognition that this was supposed to happen? Do you think there was a little hope that something big was coming?

I often imagine Mary at the tomb on the third day. She was completely devastated at the loss of her Lord. She felt hopeless, abandoned, insecure in her future, and wondering what her purpose was. As she wept at the tomb, these feelings had to be overwhelming and then there he was. It took a minute for her to recognize him and understand that this was her Lord standing in front of her. I can’t even begin to imagine the hope she felt as she cried, “Rabboni!” and ran back to the others to tell them what she saw.

And, later, in that locked room, when Jesus appeared to the disciples and showed them his hands and side, the hope that had to flow through that room had to be incredible.

True hope has to come from our faith in and our relationship with Jesus Christ. This is the hope you can trust, the hope you can believe in. It’s not fleeting, it doesn’t change, it’s the steadfast hope that comes from your love and believe in God.

Let’s pray:

Lord, Help us to hear you saying, ‘I am your hope’. Give us the ability to hear you over all the other voices trying to be our hope. We are grabbing onto you – onto the hope you bring us. Guide us in our lives as we hold onto the hope that faith in you provides. Amen