

From the Pulpit

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“Hope Cannot Be Seen”

- Hebrews 11:1

Part II of V in sermon series “Hope Comes Alive!”

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A Baptismal meditation delivered by The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Pentecost 8, August 10, 2014, dedicated to Eliza on her baptismal day, to my daughter Sarah Ruth Sitler Ahrens in thanksgiving for her faithfulness to God in Jesus Christ through her 14 years and eight months of growing up here and now a blessing to her as she goes forth to Hocking College in Nelsonville to pursue her dreams and always to the glory of God!

“Hope Cannot Be Seen” - Hebrews 11:1

Part II of V in sermon series “Hope Comes Alive!”

To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see. Hebrews 11:1

Anyone who is among the living has hope. Ecclesiastes 9:4

Surely there is a future, And your hope will not be cut off. Proverbs 23:18

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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Hope cannot be seen. The Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 1 proclaims: *“To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for; to be certain of the things we cannot see.”*

The key to this short and powerful passage is found in one word – “*hypostasis*,” which from the Greek literally means “a standing under.” A more complex definition is “that which underlies what is apparent.” Amplified a bit further, it is that which, though unseen, exists beneath what is visible. It, then, has the sense of a foundation. Even as the foundation of a building is unseen, but the building above ground is apparent, the foundation, the *hypostasis*, is nonetheless real, supporting the building.

***Hypostasis* is the unseen support of what is standing in clear view.** Spiritually speaking, invisible faith underlies, supports, and thus motivates the visible action. Let’s bring it home....The “Faith” that undergirds this “cathedral of grace” this “house of God’s justice” is the basis of our HOPE! Hope is our rock! We build everything on Hope.

Hope can only be felt as a powerful response to something coming, something that is beyond explanation. One of teachers and spiritual mentors, the late-Fr. Henri Nouwen wrote in the introduction to book *With Open Hands*. “*Hope expects the coming of something new. Hope looks toward that which is not yet. Hope accepts the risks of the unspecified.*”

The Apostle Paul understood Hope better than any Christian writer in the early scriptures. Writing from a prison cell to the Church in Rome in 65 AD and facing his death, Paul penned these words: “... *hope that is seen is no*

hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” (Romans 8:24-25).

To have hope, we must trust in what is unseen. And we must wait patiently. If there is anything I can say about our 2000 year old faith, believing and trusting in unseen things is one of our greatest gifts.

In her book, *Living into Hope*, The Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell writes:

“Life has taught me that hope is born in the eye of the storm. Hope is not happiness. Rather it is the fulfillment that comes from a life that takes risks and loves deeply and falls and soars and falls and rises again.” (Quoted in Joan Brown Campbell’s book *Living Into Hope*, 2010, Skylight Paths, p. xx)

Joan is right about the birthplace of Hope in many of our lives. Often the unseen nature of Hope has been borne of suffering. All of us can attest to this. Some of the most hope-filled people we know have battled through cancer or oppression or depression and other horrors of life and they live to fight another day. They have walked through deserts and rainforests as survivors of torture and war, suffered holocaust, hunger, and despair in prison camps and somehow lived to tell the story. They have traversed oceans – sometimes on tiny wooden rafts – in their quest for freedom. They have survived abuse and found in the light that is in them a place to smile and they are truly

joyful. They are the ones who have no cause to hope – and yet they do.

27 years ago, I met such people up close. These were folks who had NO medical care – no eye care. They were trapped in a war zone – the Contra War. There they were... People, in the words of Paul who were waiting patiently for that which they did not have or Hope to have. I was on an Eye Mission trip in Nicaragua. Our Canadian and American team flew into the middle of the Contra War– funded and supported by Ronald Reagan and our US Government.

People came from all over the mountains of rural Nicaragua – walking through the Contras’ and Sandinistas battlegrounds to get eyeglasses, possible surgery and eye care for their children and themselves. They lined up for several days in a line that wove through small streets of this mountain community (at least a mile long) – waiting patiently for the clinic to open. The night before we opened, everyone disappeared. I walked out of our compound and there were no people there. The next morning they were back in line. When I asked what happened, they told me they remembered their place in line, went to stay in a family or friends or neighbors home and returned to their place in line.... Almost 1,000 people did this with no fighting, no arguing. There were even Contras in the line – who found shelter for the night. I was blown away. We – who struggle to be nice in the check-out line at the store, we could learn something from these hopeful people. **We wait patiently for what we do not see – if our hope is found in the spirit of God! Learning from**

our Nicaraguan neighbors is a blessing. The challenge for us is to interpret this blessing – here and now.

This week I want you look for Hope – which may be hiding from you in clear view. After all, part of the habitat of Hope is hidden-ness. Look for it in the nooks and crannies of your daily living. There it is growing and prospering. You may need to start by looking in a different way.

- Try asking more “why” questions of hopeful people.
- Be fully present and still in situations that seem chaotic or unfamiliar.
- Recall past hopes that were realized over time.
- Look inside despair, anger, fear, and evil to find the spores of hope.
- Suspend your usual thinking about “the bottom line” or “at the end of the day.”

Listen carefully to those who lived through the great depression or were imprisoned as prisoners of war or holocaust survivors. You will hear stories of hope. Listen carefully to people who are poor and struggling on the edge of life tell you how they have been “blessed by God.” Watch your reactions to people who present themselves as hopeless. Maybe through it all, you will discover that hope is not hidden after all. You may even begin to see hope everywhere.

Blessings to you as you live into hope. May God open your eyes to see Hope in hidden and previously unseen places. Amen.

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