

*A communion meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, August 5, 2012, Pentecost 10 , dedicated to the memory of the 12 dead men, women and children in Aurora, Colorado, and those 52 wounded ones who are healing from gun violence that struck them at midnight on July 20, 2012, and always to the glory of God!*

**“The Anchor of Hope”**  
**Hebrews 6:18b-19**

**Part II of VI in the sermon series**  
**“Shining God’s Light on Hidden Christian Virtues”**

*“Be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul . . . through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

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

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Four months ago this week, we gathered for Easter Worship. It was the most obviously hopeful day of the Christian year. Our text from the Gospel of Mark (16:1-8), told us of the Easter women going to the tomb of Jesus on the first day of the week.

Hearts broken by Jesus’ death, they made their way through the pre-dawn darkness to the resting place of their fallen hero, friend, and healing savior. They carried the anointing oil with which they would properly prepare the hastily buried body of Jesus for its final rest in the earth. They not only found the huge stone of

the tomb rolled away but a young man in a white garment sitting in the place where Jesus had been laid. He announced they shouldn't be afraid. Jesus was raised from the dead. He had gone to Galilee before them where he would meet them once again.

Mark tells us that the women were terrified. They were so frightened that "they said nothing to anyone." But we know that their terror turned to hope and joy. We know that out of their suffering and loss, out of their grief and stumbling in the dark, even out of the shock and awe at Easter sunrise, terror turned to hope and they became witnesses of the Christ's resurrection joy!

Considering this story, is it any wonder that the Apostle Paul writes, "Hope does not disappoint us?!"

**Hope is a central anchor of our Christian life.** But hope is not a sweet and sappy optimism – as we see in this story of Christ's resurrection. Not at all. As theologian and scholar Elaine Pagels notes, *"This end would be very bad news if it weren't that underneath this rather dark story is **an enormous hope** that this very unpromising story and its terrible anguished ending is nevertheless not the ending, that there's a mystery in it, a divine mystery of God's revelation that will happen yet."*

In her book, *Living into Hope*, 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)

Hope is quite often 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 and the horrors of life and live to fight another day. They have walked through deserts and rainforests as survivors of torture and war, suffered in prison camps and somehow lived to tell the story, 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

rejoice in the life that is in them. We have witnessed the world's greatest Olympics athletes stumbling and falling on the world's largest stage and rising and shining in the bright lights.

You see, hope reflects the state of your soul rather than the circumstances surrounding your days. When we praise God, our souls get stronger.

Years ago, I was volunteering in a parochial school in my neighborhood on Cleveland's west side. I was walking down the hallway with the principal, Sister Mary Griffin. She was telling me how hard life was for the children in her school. As we walked and talked, we approached a kindergartner in the hallway. She was a beam of light - buoyant, beautiful and filled with hope in the day that God had given her. When she overheard our conversation about the hard life of the children, she stopped, turned and looked at her principal and said - with tears in her eyes - "Principal Griffin, Nobody ever told me life was hard." Hope had just encountered hardship. The principal knelt down and hugged her tiny kindergartner and reassured her that she was loved and would continue to shine God's light.

Hope meets us in empty hallways at school as well as the empty tomb and turns our tears into dancing. Hope meets us in our down days and lifts us to new beginnings. Hope does not disappoint us.

In his classic book *A Theology of Hope*, published 45 years ago and forged in the soul of this WWII German prisoner of war whom "Jesus Christ found" in the POW camp in Belgium, Jurgen Moltmann writes:

*"Hope alone can be called 'realistic' because it alone takes seriously the possibilities with which all reality is fraught. Hope does not take things as they happen to (be), but as progressing, moving things with possibilities of change. Only as long as the world and the people in it are in a fragmented and experimental state, which is not yet resolved, is there any sense of earthly hopes. . . . Hope is not a transfigured glow superimposed on a darkened existence but a*

*realistic way of perceiving the scope of our real possibilities, and as such, hope sets everything in motion and keeps it in a state of change.”* (Jurgen Moltmann, *A Theology of Hope*, SCM Press, 1967, p. 25).

In other words, hope is living, breathing, real and realistic. It is moving, changing and ever bringing us new possibilities in the midst of our lives.

When we live into hope, we see the challenges before us as opportunities. We drop anchor in the immense sea of God’s love, and we place ourselves in the faith of the Risen Christ as we discover that our anchor of hope keeps us steady in the storms of our lives.

This week, look into your life. Name and claim the Christian virtue of hope. Look at your life and give thanks to God for the hope that is in you. In the words of the Letter to the Hebrews: “Seize the hope that is set before you. Trust that this hope is your soul’s sure and steadfast anchor placed there . . . through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Amen.

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