

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

Nov 30, 2014

Found by Hope

Ps 80:1-7 & 1 Corinthians:4-5

(119, 128, 133, 141)

Last night, Jill and I took a trip down memory lane. We watched together the PBS program on '50 Years of Peter, Paul, and Mary.' They were a folk group that had a huge influence on us from the 1960s on. They sang a message of hope in the face of racism, war, and inequality. The civil rights movement was challenging the brutality of race relations. The peace movement was challenging the arms race and new wars. The freedom movements around the world were challenging political and economic oppression and imperialism. Hope was indeed a star that shone bright in that night, shedding the light of peace, joy, and love into the dark corners of our lives.

Many at the time and since have seen those sentiments as a silly kind of optimism, hopelessly unrealistic and doomed to failure. For some of us, however, that dream is still alive and well. We still hope for, pray for, work for a world in which all people find a space to live in hope, peace, joy, and love.

The powers that control many principalities in this world mock and dismiss such idealism. They play to selfishness, fear, and pride in ways that create and sustain violent divisions among races, religions, countries, and classes. They develop elaborate rationalizations for these attitudes and actions. They use new technologies to spread their brands of hatred. They seek to drown the voices of hope, peace, joy, and love in their blare of arrogance and aggression.

But hope is not that fragile.
Peace is not that delicate.
Joy is not that feeble.
Love is not that weak.

There is an incredible strength in these things
because they are from God.

That is the perspective from which Christians see the world.
It's not a silly kind of optimism.
It's a saving kind of hope.
It saves us because it is grounded
in the enrichment God has given each and every person
so they can use their knowledge and words to flourish together.

Paul is telling the Corinthian community of Christian disciples
that their hope lies in what God has done within them and among them.
God has done it through the coming of Jesus, the Christ,
and continues to do it through the agency of the Holy Spirit.
He has brought them hope because he has restored the covenant.
He will again, without anger or judgment, be their God
so they can bless the world.

Think on those you know who see the world
through God's eyes of hope.

There were the people in this congregation
who went to Presbytery three times
to argue for the continuation of Brentwood's work and witness
when some within the Presbytery wanted to close us
several years ago.
They saw, through God's eyes, hope for the future of Brentwood.

There are families in this congregation that face challenging situations –
chronic illness, acute illness, surprise illness,
death, separation, loss of jobs –
who, in the midst of their sadness and pain
find hope through their faith that God is with them,
their faith that nothing can separate them from the love of God.
They see, through God's eyes, hope for a continuing life with God.

There are people in this community
seeking to protect its resources and safety
who show up in the rain and cold on Burnaby Mountain,
under threat of arrest,
to protest the actions of a pipeline company
given permission to drill
through a most inadequate process of approval.
They see, through God's eyes, hope for sustainable and safe development.

There are people in our larger metropolitan area
who hand out the socks we send them
to people who live on the streets
after they have bathed and massaged their feet
in warm water and essentials oils.
They see, through God's eyes, hope that a simple act of kindness
will create space for a vision of new possibilities.

There are people in our First Nations communities –
I think especially of Mary Fontaine here in Vancouver
and Margaret Mullin in Winnipeg –
who do not let grinding poverty or substance addictions
define their dignity as people and who work in hope for a better future.
They see, through God's eyes, hope for truth,
healing, and reconciliation.

There are the social and political leaders
around whom the activist singers like Peter, Paul, and Mary gathered –
Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Cesar Chavez –
who called for a nonviolent path of protest and organizing
to change the world, even in the face of violent responses.
They saw, through God's eyes, hope for peace with justice.

We all have the freedom and the capacity
to see things through the eyes of anger and violence,
through the eyes of greed and exploitation,
through the eyes of protective power and manic manipulation.
Many who rule this world see things that way.

But it is not the way the God who comes in Jesus Christ
sees the world.

When he comes,
when he finds us in the midst of our darkneses,
he brings a hope that is resilient enough
to withstand and ultimately triumph over
all that makes us fearful.

When he comes,
we will be found by the hope that God sowed within us.
Deep will respond to deep
and the joy of peace with justice,
the joy of love,
will blossom and flourishing within and among us.

Take heart from the examples we have mentioned this morning.
Know that, through God's grace in Jesus Christ,
you already have that resilient hope within you.
Open your souls to God's way of seeing things
and rejoice as you are found by hope.

***Now to him who by the power at work within us
is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations,
forever and ever. Amen
(Eph 3:20-21)***