

“LOVE WITH SKIN ON—Living in Hope”
Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35 & 1 Peter 1:3-9

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Hope, we all need it, but sometimes we don't have it. I crave the Lord's presence and the joy of experiencing true hope. We have that hope in the resurrection power. Next Sunday we will celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. It's Pentecost and I will remind you: WEAR RED!

Since Easter, we have been in a Sermon series about "Love with skin on it." Love with skin on is embodied with the coming to earth in a lowly manger the baby that would grow into a man and die on Calvary's cross. Love with skin on is about Emmanuel-God WITH US. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, Jesus did not leave us on our own. God did not leave us with a beautiful but meaningless definition of love. Nor did he sit idly by telling us how deeply he loved us.

Love with Skin on is embodied in the message from John 1:14: we can see, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." God showed up. He literally pitched a tent and began going through life with us, his people. With all the messiness of our lives, Jesus Christ is here in our midst. Jesus is alive and, in our midst. He's present through the church body.

Some months ago, when I preached, I mentioned an injury on my hand and talked about outward scars and bruises being a metaphor for psychological and emotional injuries. I have an active job and injuries, bruises, scratches, and wounds are inevitable. Earlier this week, I had a Labrador Retriever injury during an office appointment. I walked away with scratches that were quite painful. They are still sore and there is a good-sized bruise to remember the encounter.

My hand injury is a metaphor for the wounds that we sustain navigating life. I pondered how in just a relatively short time, now that the pain has subsided, and the healing process began. Yes, I have a large bruise on my hand but from my experience, with time, those signs of my injury will fade.

What bruises and injuries have you had recently? Maybe they were physical. Maybe they were emotional - a loved one forgetting an important date or anniversary, a slight in our professional lives, or even a negative online review.

I've briefly mentioned the toll negative, online reviews take on our psyche as veterinary professionals. I was fixated on negative reviews that were unjustly written about me. I had also recently read an article in a veterinary journal that oversimplified the problem, the title was "The toll negative reviews take." How's that for an epiphany?

None of us wants unflattering things written about us or our job performance. No one wants any harsh words directed at them. What unkind words have been said to you? What slights, intentional or not, have you been the victim of?

I must tell you that knowing there are people here today actively experiencing pain, sorrow, and suffering for themselves or a loved one, I feel your burden. So many situations I don't have an elixir to fix, the right words to say, or the ability to take away your misery. But I know who does! God has the power to heal our woundedness.

Remember who you belong to: Watch your self-talk. Remind yourself not to have expectations of other people, including how they "should" think or behave. We can't predict how people will behave and expecting them to think or behave according to our own standards and needs only leads to disappointment. Realistically, you can only expect that they will be who they are. For better or worse.

We must also remind ourselves that sometimes harsh things come out as slips of the tongue. We should try not to take things personally. Sometimes people say things that are thoughtless, or just plain dumb because they are uneducated, or too caught up in their own problems to step outside of themselves and try to understand how someone else is living in the world.

God has the power to break in and enter our lives through his people or a miraculous change in perspective or circumstances. God can and will often enter our lives. Just like the physical bruises that fade or the wounds on our skin heal with time, God can bind up our brokenness. He cares.

Last week was especially rough, seeing people vital and knowing that their absence is going to be such a huge loss. That's what I want to communicate to you and what I want you to leave with. You are not alone. You are not facing life

on your own, the Lord God is journeying with you. He has sent the Paraclete for you to be comforted.

There are spots in pews marking the absence of loved ones who have been called home. When someone lives a full life, clearly committed to the Lord, we can take solace when they pass. We can know their eternal destination and that they are in their heavenly home.

Calvary has lost important members of our church family, people who had visible relationships with the Lord. Yes, grief is palpable in this room. It has been like a gut punch, and with all the loss this congregation has experienced and all the transitions we have lots of reasons to be burdened and feel weighed down with sadness and grief.

I heard a news report that 1/3 of all adults experience depression in the US. According to the Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, half (50%) of adults ages 18-24 reported anxiety and depression symptoms in 2023. The data also show that young adults are more likely than adults of any other age group to experience mental health symptoms. Economically this is a huge problem. The NDC estimates that it costs the US economy over \$210 billion dollars annually in lost wages. It's the leading cause of disability in people 15-44. Depression ranks amongst the top 3 workplace issues in the US along with stress and family crisis.

There is so much pain and suffering in the world. And there is so much brokenness, rudeness, and broken, suffering people. Unfortunately, I can't fix that problem. But we have a suffering Savior, that came to Earth to experience all the things that life as a human being. He came to live amongst us.

Jesus was the embodiment of a God that loves humanity beyond what is reasonable or what we deserve. We are a rebellious, fickle lot but the Lord still loves us. He still holds on to our hand as we navigate life.

I read this quote from an article arguing that Hope for humanity is possible. The scholar Thomas Keller wrote, "Christianity...offers unparalleled resources for cultural hope. (We are not for the moment talking about individual hope—hope for life after death. We are talking about corporate hope, social hope, hope for the future of society, of the human race—hope for a good direction to history.)

Looking at the arc of history through the lens of Christ's resurrection, we can make four broad statements about the nature of Christian hope: It is uniquely reasonable, full, realistic, and effective." Thomas Keller continues in this article to summarize the essence of where our hope comes from, "This is the fullest possible hope. The resurrection of Christ promises us not merely some future consolation for the life we lost but the restoration of the life we lost and infinitely more. It promises the world and life that we have always longed for but never had.

Annalise and Lynette sang about it "It's been a hard year." Wow, isn't that an understatement? We must remember that life on this planet is transitory. Our time spent on Earth passes so quickly. Relationships are formed and then there is change. There are deaths, losses, and life can often feel like a rollercoaster. But I am here to tell you not to give up. Hang on. Jesus has a tight grip on your hand, and he will never leave you or forsake you. The author of the song describes the transitory nature of relationships...grief, loss, loneliness, and despair. She sings about having the sensation of being on a ledge, and barely clinging to that hope. She describes the relief that she feels when she surrenders her pain, her suffering to the Lord. In Jesus Christ, we find our home...our safe place... our destination.

It's been a hard year, so many nights in tears
All of the darkness, tryin' to fight my fears
Alone
So long alone

She describes that in addition to feeling alone, she is barely hanging on. She cries out to the Lord to hold her hand and in doing so she is able to breathe, without the weight and heaviness of life holding her down. With Jesus by her side, she can take the long road and with her relationship, the arrows and slings of the enemy don't matter anymore. For she is home.

The lyrics continue:
I don't know who I'd be if I didn't know You
I'd probably fall off the edge
I don't know where I'd go if You ever let go
So keep me held in Your hands
I've started breathing, the weight is lifted here

With you it's easy, my head is finally clear
There's nothin' missing when You are by my side
I took the long road, but now I realize
I'm home
With You, I'm home
I don't know who I'd be if I didn't know You
I'd probably fall off the edge
I don't know where I'd go if You ever let go
So keep me held in Your hands
I don't know who I'd be if I didn't know You
I'd probably fall off the edge
I don't know where I'd go if You ever let go
So keep me held in Your hands
You're my safe place, my hideaway
You're my anchor, my saving grace
You're my constant, my steadiness
You're my shelter, my oxygen

This is what I want to take away: surrender your pain, your sorrow, your emptiness to Him. Let the Lord bear your burdens. We are told to cast our cares onto him. To be held in Jesus' arms means we ARE HOME. We can stop striving, stop fighting, and relax...we are at peace. We may face trials, but these will just be temporary and in the end, we will be welcomed into a glorious conclusion. In the meantime, we journey through life with the power of the Holy Spirit to be our guide, our navigator.

May the Lord continue to walk with you! Let's remember the lyrics of Lauren Daigle and the takeaway of this beautiful song. She says of the Lord and what it means to know him and to be with him entirely. Knowing the Lord impacts who we are and how we go through life:
You're my safe place, my hideaway
You're my anchor, my saving grace
You're my constant, my steadiness
You're my shelter, my oxygen
I don't know who I'd be if I didn't know You
Thank God I do