

Romans 8 is one of the most beautiful and powerful chapters in the Bible. It begins with a verse that reminds us there is no condemnation in Christ and ends with a message of complete victory over every opponent through Christ. It's filled with the truth of what it means to be filled with God's Spirit, even acknowledging that through this Spirit we get to call God, the Father our "Dad." But one of the main themes that knits it all together is the word "hope." Hope is the expectation of something happening...Creation "hopes" for its future renewal...God's Children "hope" for the day we don't live in these worn out or wearing out temporary bodies. "Hope" is the very essence of why we live by faith and not by sight. That truth is captured in Romans 8:24,

"For in this hope we were saved. But 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."

C.S. Lewis, the great Christian author, summed it up this way:

*"Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise.*

*"At present we are on the outside...the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the pleasures we see. But all the pages of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Someday, God willing, we shall get "in"...We will put on glory...that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch.*

*We do not want to merely "see" beauty—though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.*

My ultimate hope is eternity...Heaven, but until then I have the privilege to serve the One who has made that hope possible. And I believe my calling in ministry has been to glorify Jesus and make His commandments the most important things at Gardenside Christian Church. It's so easy for us to get caught up in past traditions, many of them that focused on glorifying Jesus and His commands in their day...but then possibly became more important than that purpose. I say this because no Church...big "C" not little "c" can share the hope of Christ this world needs if Jesus, and His commands become the sidecar to our motorcycle.

I think when I first came to Gardenside I thought I'd be able to lead a hurting people into a better place. This was my "Hope." Each of the decisions that have been made through this wilderness journey were made to get God's people to the place He wanted us to be...A little like Moses leading the Israelite's to the promised land. They spent 40 years in that wilderness.

Many of those who grumbled and complained were buried there. And I certainly understand why Moses got mad enough to smack the rock instead of speaking to it...but because of that he didn't get to go in with the people he loved so much...He got to see it from Mount Nebo...but he didn't get to go in...another had to take them in...Joshua. I believe Moses was OK with that considering his calling from God.

Here's what Moses says to God's people and Joshua in Deuteronomy 31:7,8

*7 Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. 8 The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."*

A year ago or so after my second heart attack I shared with our leadership team that I'd come to the realization I was called to Gardenside Christian Church to get God's people to the Jordan...I truly have been allowed by God to see where He wants to take His people, but at almost 60 I'm not the one that gets to take you across the Jordan. It requires a Joshua. My hope is that God will identify a young man who will become a co-leader and preacher here at Gardenside, and his focus will be on building up families, including our students and children and their parents, but that the lead role will be passed into his hands over a 2 or 3 year period. My job will be to disciple and help him reach this place, to help Pastor God's flock here at Gardenside and to teach and strengthen this congregation for its future. This is a unified decision by your Elders and Preacher because of the living "hope" we have in Jesus...and the love we have for His Church.

One of my favorite movies is "The Shawshank Redemption." A man named Andy Dufrane is wrongly accused of murdering his wife and sent to Shawshank Prison for the rest of his life. He is befriended by a fellow prisoner named "Red." Andy is good with numbers...an accountant and the crooked Warden takes advantage of Andy's skills to steal money from the coffers. It's a horrible and abusive time for Andy...but he escapes...digging out and crawling through 500 feet of sewage pipe. But he also has developed a plan to empty the bank account of the Warden...which he does...to the tune of 300 grand....Andy escapes to a Mexican beach called **Zihuatanejo**....When Red is miraculously paroled he remembers Andy had told him about a secret place he would leave something for him in a cigar box under a tree...Red retrieves it...there's money...a hint about where he is, and a letter...it ends by saying:

"Red...if you've come this far...maybe you'll come a little farther...Hope is a good thing...Maybe the Best thing."

Spoiler alert: Red went the rest of the way and reached that beautiful place and his best friend.

This is what I want for Gardenside Christian Church more than anything...to reach that beautiful place and our best friend.