

September 19 & 20, 2020  
“Courageous Hope”  
Rev. Liz Whitford

*Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you <sup>2</sup> to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. <sup>3</sup> Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.*

- 1 Peter 5:1-4

Last week at our kick off Sunday, we began talking about being courageous. The idea of being courageous in a time where things are so hard and uncertain may draw us to be tired. Tired in our minds. Tired in our bodies. Tired in our faith. Yet, Pastor Markus encouraged us that when fear, in all its shapes, wants to control us we need courageous faith to make it day to day. to celebrate the small victories. God’s Got this. God is not overwhelmed.

We come together today to expand from courageous faith to courageous hope.

We read a very different kind of passage today than perhaps we would have preferred. Perhaps when we think of hope, we want to envision the Bible passage that was our focus 2 weeks ago, “Come to me all who are weary, and I will give you rest.” Some of us may need that kind of hope right now...the hope that allows us to rest.

Today, I want to go a different direction with our hope.

There’s this videogame. Yes. I just said video game. I grew up watching my brother play from Sega Genesis to Nintendo 64 on and on until he hit Nintendo Switch. Recently, he brought up to me this wonderful game about death. I know it sounds strange, but this game, Spiritfarer, is about a character that guides spirits to the Everdoor, a bridge gateway that allows them to be at peace. This game is all about bringing hope back to spirits as they prepare for eternity. At the beginning of the game, we are told, “Hope is a flame, the light that never falters, the beacon of eternity. There is no task more important than this one.” What wise words coming from a game that a 6-year-old could play!

In a season where things are constantly changing, where uncertainty seems to be the norm, where people need hope, we are called by God to continue to follow God’s light and shine God’s light.

Our passage today, may make us tired. It may make us weary. It may make us want to ignore the sermon. But what if I told you that we, 21<sup>st</sup> century human beings, are putting way too much emphasis on ourselves in this passage. While this scripture may seem like we are given a higher task, one of work, one of time, one of energy, one of babysitting, we really are just being a magnifying glass. By the hope that we show, we are magnifying the hope that God gives. We are examples.

We are asked to be caretakers, not masters. Caretakers not authoritarians. The caretakers understood here were meant to be examples. No extra work necessary, just living as an example for another. Being an example may seem like a lot of extra work, but you are simply living your life by the example that you've been given, Jesus.

Let's take a minute and look at Jesus's example. Jesus liked people. He gave respect to all those who needed it. Jesus cared about the children and those in need. Jesus wasn't afraid to be who he was created to be and knew that God loved him. So basically, we are called to like people, to respect and care about all, to be who we are created to be, and know that we are loved.

Let's go a step further and envision when what it could look like metaphorically to be a caregiver in this sense.

Let's think of this hope-light that God is as being the sun. It's a bright light that has been created by God, full of warmth, full of light, set together by microscopic creations. (While we may have cloudy days, we will not consider it for this example, agreed?) As we use our magnifying glass, ourselves, the light pierces through even the darkest spot, and there is where you find hope. Imagine now, if we looked at "the flock" God's loved ones and used multiple magnifying glasses. The more magnification that is presented with the sun, the greater the focused piercing strength, the more hope is found.

Now you may feel like this is all well and good, but giving hope takes a lot of energy. Energy that we may not have. BUT we give hope even when we don't realize it. This is not an additional task, but an unlocking of what is already within us. Hope is the little blessings that are found in life: the open parking spot near the store, the smile someone else gives us through their eyes (in this mask season), the sun that shines. Hope is the kind words that are said to one another. Hope is the idea that God's love never falters even when we are struggling. Hope is knowing we are not alone. Hope is the light of God that never falters.

So, how does this all come together with being courageous. I've just tried to convince you that being hope-filled is easy, so how can we be courageous with it?

We're tired. We've established that. We all know that we could all use a vacation from COVID-19, and maybe just never come back to it. The courage behavior we are called to, is one of stepping beyond the complacency of worldly fear and stepping into a God-realm of hope. A place where we can see that all of this is only temporary.

As we are called to courageous faith and courageous hope, we are encouraged by God to acknowledge that God is with us. We are called and encouraged not only to accept this, but to live into it. How can you live into your hope today and exhibit a hope that many don't have right now? How can you be an example without feeling that you are working harder? How can you be a magnifying glass of hope that pierces through all the darkness.

"Hope is a flame, the light that never falters, the beacon of eternity. There is no task more important than this one."