A.M.D.G. July 12th, 2015 Texts: Lamentations 3

 Romans 5: 1-5

**Hope: Shouting In The Darkness**

 I don’t know about you – but I am finding it more and more difficult to watch or listen to the news these days. Talk of forest fires burning out of control, water shortages, animal abuse, gangland killings in our area, and increasing domestic violence – all bring our bubble of safety and privilege crashing down around our ears. No longer are the problems affecting the world ‘out there’, where we might sympathize from a safe distance. Suddenly – here ***we*** are living within the midst of unmistakeable symptoms of things like climate change and worrying about the possibility of a recession. How are we to navigate the turmoil, the threats, and the anxiety that swirls all around us? How do we keep ourselves from despair? Where do we find hope in the midst of a world gone mad? …. Do any of these questions haunt you – as they do me – in the cracks between sleep and consciousness in the middle of the night?

 I recently read an article by Jim Wallis – founder of the Sojourner’s Community in Washington, DC – a Christian writer, and social activist working with some of the toughest, most vulnerable people. He suggests that one of the biggest problems we face as a society – the biggest enemy at the heart of many of the issues we must address – is hopelessness. And that perhaps the most important things the world needs from the faith community today is hope. Let’s talk bit about that together this morning ….

 First of all – how would you ***define hope***? Here are some definitions of hope that I found on the internet.

\* From Emily Dickinson: “Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without the words, and never stops at all.”

\* “Hope is the little voice you hear whisper ‘maybe’ when it seems the entire world is shouting ‘no’!

\* “Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us.”

\* “When the world says ‘Give up!’ – hope is the voice that whispers ‘try it one more time’.

\* From President Obama: “Hope is that stubborn thing inside us that insists that something better awaits us so long as we have the courage to keep reaching, to keep working, to keep fighting.”

\* Hope anchors the soul

Is there one in particular that you identify with?

Okay – let’s go a bit deeper. As I was putting together the powerpoint for this morning, and trying to find suitable images to go with the readings, music and prayers, I had to struggle with another question: ‘***What does hope look like***?’ How would you answer that? It’s an interesting question, isn’t it? But an important one if we are going to recognize hope when it appears.

 In his article, Jim Wallis suggests that hope is not just a feeling – but a ***decision.*** “*Hope*,” he says, “*is our vocation and our identity as the people of God. Let’s put it this way – when we confront the depth of things we address, we must also understand our role. And I am convinced that hope is our job as people of faith.*” **Hope is our job!** I had never thought of it quite that way before. As people of faith – ***we*** are the ones who must hold the candle in the darkness and not give up or into despair – trusting that God will bring light even into situations that seem the most hopeless.

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 ***We*** are the ones who must be constantly on the look-out for glimpses of hope to appear – identifying them and holding them up whenever we find them: rainbows after the rain, acts of compassion and generosity, forgiveness in the midst of hatred and violence, smiles and words of kindness, standing up against injustice, working for reconciliation and right relationships ….. Hope is our ***job*** as people of faith!

In their song ‘I’ll Go Crazy If I Don’t Go Crazy’ – Bono and the band ‘U2’ sing these words:

 *How can you stand next to the truth and not see it?*

 *A change of heart comes slow.*

 *It’s not a hill, it’s a mountain*

 *As we start out the climb*

 *Listen for me – I’ll be shouting*

 *Shouting to the darkness – squeeze out sparks of light.*

Our ***job*** as people of faith is hope. It is to shout in the darkness – and squeeze out sparks of light!

 One commentator I was reading used the metaphor of a soup kitchen. She wrote: *“We can despair that the financial and psychological hardships of the people served at the soup kitchen may never be resolved. Or we can choose to see hope in the kitchen sink full of dirty dishes and pans after feeding the hungry. We might miss it if we only focus on the despair of the situation. But God gifts us with the ability to see the sparks of light – to see the hope and to rejoice in that hope.”*

 Our reading from the book of Lamentations this morning speaks of hope in much the same way. Most probably written around 586 BCE - it was indeed a time of lament - set against the backdrop of the destruction of Jerusalem, the leadership taken into exile, and the Temple in ruins. But shouting into the darkness of despair and hopelessness – the author of Lamentations writes these powerful words:

 *“Yet, I still dare to hope when I remember this: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.*

 *God’s mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning.*

 *Great is your faithfulness, O Lord!”*

Still I dare to hope!! It is our job as people of faith to shout in the darkness – to squeeze out the sparks of light wherever they may be found. And St. Paul, in his letter to the church in Rome, reminds us of our basis for hope: *“Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance produces character; and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (vss 3-5)*

And so – I have one final question for you this morning. Where do you see the spirit of hope alive in our times? What gives you the greatest hope for yourself, for your children and grandchildren, and for our world?

This week, as we go about our lives, may we be on the lookout for hope – the sparks of light we see in the people and situations we encounter, in the beauty of creation all around us – and even in the darkness of the uncertainty and struggle of our world. And through them – see the presence and faithfulness of our God. And rejoice! Amen. May it be so!