

Hope That Does Not Disappoint©

Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

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Last Sunday was Pentecost Sunday, as most of you know. I love Pentecost Sunday about as much as I love Easter, so you can imagine how much I regretted being gone for that special day and how very much I desired to be at the conference I attended since it meant not being here for Pentecost.

The Festival of Homiletics was inspiring and encouraging – listening to great preachers and teachers who have much hope and enthusiasm for what new things God is doing among us in this present time. I only pray that as time goes on, I will be able to share and help encourage you in the same way that I was encouraged.

So, I heard that you had a great time – a party, celebrating the birthday of the church. You wore red in remembrance of the great coming of the Holy Spirit that blew in like a mighty, holy wind and that struck the heads of the disciples like red tongues of fire, causing them to speak in languages they had not known before – languages that all those from many other countries could understand.

They heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached with power and clarity, and thousands became believers that day and took that Good News back to their country – and the church was born!

It was my prayer all last weekend that there would be some new spark right here among you; that the presence of the Holy Spirit would be known in a fresh, new, powerful way.

I will tell you that, during the last morning's worship – a Pentecost worship service, after hearing inspiring sermons and lectures all week, I was moved deeply while we were taking communion. I was the second to be served among hundreds of people – preachers and spouses – and while I sat there holding that bread and cup, praying for you, for us, for me – I felt an amazing moving of God deep inside my soul. It was good for the preacher to be the one in the pew, being served and having time to reflect on what it means to eat and drink that spiritual food, given to us by Jesus.

I was blessed to get home safely without going through any of the terrible storms that were forming and hitting in other places in the country. Of course, it is especially difficult for Fred and me to hear about severe weather and destructive tornados in Oklahoma where we are from and where we still have family living.

We are so grateful that our family is all safe, but it grieves us to see the devastation left from the tornado in Moore. These are our people; that state is our home.

Having grown up in "Tornado Alley" we have a healthy respect and fear of those dangerous funnels. The springtime automatically meant that "Tornado Watches" were

the norm. And living way out in the country, keeping an eye out, scanning the sky, was a regular thing.

My brother, David, and I got a little cocky after dad built the storm cellar. We suddenly were much braver than we had been – sitting out on top of the cellar while the rest of the family sat underground. We were “on watch.” But I guarantee you, if we’d seen a tornado coming, we would have been terrified, and would have shot down into that shelter like a rabbit diving into a hole when being chased by a pack of dogs.

Interesting, isn’t it, that we pray for a strong and powerful wind – the winds of the Spirit to move among the Church again; to stir us up and shake us into new faith. But we didn’t really intend on the kind of wind that happened, did we?

How many of you here have gone through the destruction and devastation of a storm, or a fire, or (don’t say it too loud – a flood)?

If you have lost your home or part of your home, you know that overwhelming sense of just not knowing what to do or where to turn or how you will ever get beyond the mess and the loss. And if you lost a loved one – a child, a family member, a beloved pet – the grief is heavy and causes you to be so numb you feel you can’t move.

How is it possible, then, to have hope in these situations? Yet Paul writes that in our sufferings, we find endurance and strength and yes – a hope that does not disappoint.

Today is Trinity Sunday – a day to celebrate and worship the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is one that is difficult to understand; so difficult, in fact, that David Lose, Associate Professor of Preaching at Luther Seminary, who was at the Festival of Homiletics – the one I’ve quoted quite often recently – says that he doesn’t trust anyone who claims to really, fully understand the Trinity.

It is one of those great mysteries about God that we will only fully understand when we finally join Him in all God’s glory and splendor. In the meantime, we depend on faith to help us believe in what we cannot see or understand. And that faith comes from the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised and who came in full power on the day of Pentecost.

Talk about suffering and a time of needing hope! Jesus’ disciples were certainly in that very position!

I usually follow what is known as the common lectionary to preach from. It is a three-year cycle that has several selections of Scripture to choose from, helping us to get through most of the main stories in the Bible in that three-year period. There was a committee of scholars who worked together to form this common lectionary and it is called “common” in that many churches use it. It is not unusual to go to a different church and find the same Scriptures are being used on any Sunday.

But sometimes I wonder about that committee! We build up to Easter and the glorious celebration of Jesus' resurrection and then ... then we go back to all the talks Jesus had with his disciples, helping them to be prepared for his leaving. We have been reading about that ever since Easter, it seems! It almost feels like we are going backwards.

Yet, isn't that really just what we need? Life is full – yes, of celebrations – but really, there is more suffering, more cause for anxiety and fear, for frustrations and uncertainty – than celebrations, isn't there?

Maybe you have never been struck by a natural disaster, or been in harms way from a terrorist, or been in any kind of tragic accident. But, I'm pretty sure you have had storms in your life that have caused suffering and anxiety and pain.

Most of us have had to experience losing a loved one; enduring an illness; losing a job and having the fear and anxiety of how we were going to support our family; maybe even losing our home.

We all have faced some kind of pain and suffering in our lives – some more than others – but the human condition is not all about fun and peace and satisfaction, is it?

We have experienced similar feelings like the disciples who were devastated that Jesus was leaving – and maybe even a little angry (after all, they had given up their life to have life with him). But they were surely afraid too. If Jesus' life was being sought out and in danger, surely his followers were in the same boat.

Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit was huge. I wonder if they had any inkling of just how big that promise was? This was the powerful force that would be Friend, Encourager, Advocate, Comforter, Helper, Faith-giver – Power-giver, Love-pourer-outer to them.

This was the Spirit of God that would enable them to endure their own trials and suffering and yes, even death. It was the power that would enable them to preach like never before – even in other languages! It was the Spirit that would be the holy glue that kept them, and followers to come, together forever.

Jesus said "I can't explain everything right now. You would not be able to bear it." I think he was talking about a lot of things to come – things they would endure in the near future; things about God that is too big for them (and us) to comprehend; things that would happen down through the ages right up to you and me and our lives that are so full of so much joy and pain. Too much to grasp.

Yet – Jesus said: But when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is. He won't draw attention to himself,

but will make sense out of what is about to happen and, indeed, out of all that I have done and said.

The winds of the Spirit are, believe it, more powerful than any EF 5 tornado; more powerful than any destruction a storm can cause; more powerful, yes, even than death itself.

Because Jesus promised to send the Advocate, the Comforter, the Truth Revealer after he was gone, we have this hope that is beyond understanding, beyond any earthly sense, really. It is a hope that only comes from knowing the Truth – that is the Son of God, the Giver of New Life – a life of forgiveness and joy and most of all – Trust.

The Holy Spirit helps us to trust, knowing that our lives are in the care of the one who has us in the palm of his hand; the one created us, who breathed life into us, who has our very names written on the palms of his hands, as Isaiah says.

Because of the Holy Spirit, we have trust; and because we can trust, we have hope; and this is a hope that will not disappoint because our hope is in the Lord whom we trust. If we did not trust Him we could not pray the prayer that never fails: “Your will be done!”

This is not a hope that is a fairy tale. We know we can’t hope for there never to be suffering or sorrow or pain or trials. We know that those things will always be with us.

But it is a hope that is more than our mere earthly hope. It is a heavenly hope in a powerful God whose presence and love and comfort and healing and assurance is always, always, ALWAYS there with us NO MATTER WHAT!

Whoever thinks that discipleship means safety and pain-free living has not read the story of Jesus and his followers and do not understand what the early church went through. Jesus himself suffered; his disciples suffered; and his church through out history has gone through great trials and tribulations.

Of course, when Paul talks about boasting in our suffering, he is really talking about our suffering for the sake of the Gospel. He is not saying we should brag that we have tornados that have killed and destroyed.

However, we can still say, no matter what happens to us, for whatever reason, because of our trust in God – we can still proclaim that God is with us; God loves us; our heavenly Father knows every part of us – even how many hairs we have on our heads (or how many we have lost over the years) and this God is still in control.

Our hope is not that we will never suffer; our hope is that God will never leave our side; that death is not the winner; that destruction will not destroy us. Paul says in another letter – whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lords. (Romans 14)

Our bodies, souls, minds, everything that makes you and me – all belong to God.
Always. Forever His.

And that is a hope that will not disappoint. Ever.

Thanks be to God for the Powerful Advocate, Comforter, Truth Revealer, Friend ... who pours God's love into our hearts and gives us this trust in a God who never leaves us, who loves us so much He came to live among us; to be with us; to die for us and to rise in power, giving us the promise of eternal life forever with him.

In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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