

SCRIPTURE TEXT: Jeremiah 14:7-9

SERMON TITLE: Hope: A Core Value

At the beginning of a new year, we're spending some time taking a look at the five core values our congregation identified and adopted in the fall of last year. You'll see our five core values on the screens. Please read them with me: LOVE, FAMILY, OUTREACH, SPIRITUAL GROWTH, HOPE. Today, we're discussing HOPE. Our scripture lesson is Jeremiah 14:7-9.

In this morning's text, God's people of the kingdom of Judah are enduring a severe draught. It produces a famine. In addition, a military threat looms. The community voices a lament to God. Listen for the word of God. **SCRIPTURE TELLING.**

Hope is a core value of this congregation. Someone once said: "Hope is the expectation of a favorable future under God's direction." (Achtemeier, Paul J. Editor. *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996, 434.) Hope is Abram and his family leaving home on the promise of God's guidance toward a land flowing with milk and honey. Hope is Moses raising his staff to part the sea with Pharaoh's army bearing down upon him. Hope is looking to the cross and seeing a way to life. Hope is standing at a grave and proclaiming words of life. One preacher says: Hope is "reaching past today. It's dreaming of tomorrow. It's trying a new way. It's pushing past impossible. It's pounding on the door. It's questioning the answers. It's always seeking more. It rumors of a breakthrough. It whispers of a cure, a rollercoaster ride of remedies, unsure." Hope is "candy for the soul. It's perfume for the spirit. To share it, makes you whole." (From Devon Huss, www.SermonCentral.com)

To keep hope alive is part of our calling as God's people. Let me tell you about a piano teacher named Herman. One night at a university concert, the featured pianist became ill while performing an extremely difficult piece. As the artist left the stage, Herman rose from his seat in the audience, walked onstage, sat down at the piano and with great mastery completed the

performance. Later that evening, at a party, one of the students asked Herman how he was able to perform such a demanding piece so beautifully without notice and no rehearsal. He replied, ‘In 1939, when I was a budding young concert pianist, I was arrested and placed in a Nazi concentration camp. Putting it mildly, the future looked bleak. But I knew that in order to keep the flicker of hope alive that I might someday play again, I needed to practice every day. I began by fingering a piece from my repertoire on my bare board bed late one night. The next night I added a second piece and soon I was running through my entire repertoire. I did this every night for five years. It so happens that the piece I played tonight at the concert hall was part of that repertoire. That constant practice is what kept my hope alive. Every day I renewed my hope that I would one day be able to play my music again on a real piano, and in freedom.’” (Hewett, James S., editor. *Illustrations Unlimited*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1988, p. 293.)

Well come to think of it, God’s people practiced keeping hope alive. During a draught in Judah with a military threat looming on the horizon, when it seemed that God had abandoned the people in their misery, God’s people lifted their prayer to God anyway—in faith—because they held fast to the belief that God was the hope of Israel—that God was Israel’s savior in the time of trouble. They envisioned a future without famine and threat—a vision kindled among them by God’s own promises. And so they appealed to God to fulfill their hopes.

And they were bold in their approach. They confessed their sins because theologically they believed that their troubles represented God’s punishment upon them for their transgressions. Now please understand that this is not the only way that this issue is viewed in the scriptures, but it is the approach taken in this prayer. The people then complained and

cajoled; they appealed to God's honor and reputation, and they stated quite clearly that both would be damaged if help was not forthcoming.

But then, in verse 10, the prophet makes it clear that help would not be forthcoming—and yet, as the story goes, the faith of God's people endured—perhaps a bit beaten and battered—until relief eventually did come.

And this is often how it is with hope. Persistence is required. For example, Bill Hybels tells the story of an interesting experience he had after a baptism service in his church. He writes: “I bumped into a woman in the stairwell who was crying. I thought this was a little odd, since the service was so joyful. I asked her if she was all right. She said, ‘No, I’m struggling.’ She said, ‘My mom was baptized today. I prayed for her every day for almost 20 years. The reason I’m crying is because I came this close to giving up on her. At the 5-year mark I said, ‘Who needs this? God isn’t listening.’ At the 10-year mark I said, ‘Why am I wasting my breath?’ At the 15-year mark I said, ‘This is absurd.’ At the 19-year mark I said, ‘I’m just a fool.’ But I just kept trying, kept praying. Even with weak faith I kept praying. Then she gave here life to Christ, and she was baptized today.’” (Quoted by Rodney Buchanan at www.SermonCentral.com) Sometimes hope requires persistence.

And as followers of Jesus Christ—the one Paul calls “our hope”—we dare not yield to despair. One pastor puts it this way: “I have had enough of people saying there’s no hope....I am sick and tired of hearing that the way things are is the way they’ll always....”

“In the last couple of years, it seems like I have been hearing this from all sorts of places. Over and over again, I hear people say things like: “We should just give up on peace in the Holy Land—they’ve always hated each other, and they always will.” Or how about this one: “Those Sunnis and the Shiites have been killing each other for hundreds of years, and we just have to

accept that they will never get along.” Or maybe this sounds familiar: “There’s no point in talking to Iran, it’s just their nature to hate America.” Every day, it seems like more and more people are giving up.”

The pastor then concludes: “A church without hope is a church without God. If God’s people give up hope, we might as well lock the front doors and throw away the key. If God’s people give up on hope, we might as well give up all the rest of it, too—we might as well give up the singing and the clapping and the praising and the preaching, because Christians without hope are Christians without good news.” (Sermon by Rev. Jeremy Peters, *Don’t Stop Thinking About Tomorrow*, www.bmpumc.org.)

But thanks be to God, in affirming hope as one of our core values, we are not giving up. We are holding fast to hope, persistently and tenaciously. We keep practicing hope in our prayers. And we are committed to being a light of hope in the world as we seek out the despairing wherever they are and share with them the hope that God has shared with us through Jesus Christ.

Let me tell you about Auntie Jane and Auntie Barbara. “In a cramped space around a Kiev sewer, 15 children ragged and stinky have spent the night crowded together for warmth. They rouse now only because they have a chance to eat. They are rejected and hungry, but not without hope. Two American women, Jane Hyatt and Barbara Laiber, kindly called the “aunties” have come with milk and bread for the hiding children.

“These ladies are joined in a mission to reach out to children who live in the streets because of poverty, alcoholism or violence in their families. There are almost 100,000 of them in Kiev alone. These Ukrainian orphans muddle along by begging or stealing. Sometimes they work as porters or prostitutes. But they are not without hope—not without a chance for the

future, because Auntie Jane and Auntie Barbara have chosen to practice” hope in the name of Jesus Christ. (Source: SermonCentral Staff. Citation: Arie Farnnam, *Help for Ukraine’s street kids, from two US Women*. Christian Science Monitor, April 08, 2002.)

There are Kiev’s everywhere: children without hope, youth without hope, adults without hope. Like our ancestors in the faith before us, we are called to be a people of hope, praying for God’s intercession and seeking out the despairing among us. If hope is to be a core value for us, then this is how our life together will look. Amen.