

Pastor's Peace

"...we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance 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."
(Romans 3:3-5, NRSV)

There are few things we all need for survival: clean air and water, nutritious food, other people with whom to interact and HOPE that, no matter the circumstances, we are loved and have a purpose. As I've reached out to our congregation, community and wider world in the past year I've heard few complaints about air quality, some ongoing frustration with Gen X in our local water supply and some folks who know that they shouldn't always fry their nutritious foods but struggle not to do so. There have been many struggling to find safe ways to interact with others in our days of COVID and quarantine. Yet, nearly all are looking for reasons to HOPE. One definition of HOPE is to "expect with confidence." (Merriam-Webster). Expecting the struggle to pass, expecting changes for the better, expecting to find purpose and peace. Yet, how does one find HOPE in on-going struggles?

The verses above tell us that HOPE is created in a process. It's not a magical process like creating a potion, with a pair of lizard lips, toad's toenails and leaf of a rare tree, mixed with special words and incantations. It doesn't come in pill form where you can take two and find immediate relief. Rather, it is often a painful process that involves the most human of experiences, suffering AND the most mystical of the divine, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. HOPE isn't just a feeling we produce by thinking happy thoughts. Rather, it's a depth of expectation that there is more to life than the current moment. That we are loved even when we feel most unlovable. That we have worth even when we feel most unworthy. In fact, the author of Romans tells us that HOPE grows directly out of suffering. Suffering and struggle may, at times break us. Suffering may, at times, sharpen us. Suffering, though, always demands more of us. At the soul level suffering often produces in us something we did not possess prior: HOPE. To get to hope, the author lets us know that it's more than just our grit, or as the text calls it endurance. It's more than just the character built over a lifetime of hardship and struggle, although those form in us. **Rather, HOPE comes with our grit combined with God's grace.** HOPE comes from the pouring out of the Paraclete, the Greek word meaning "advocate, helper, or one who comes alongside." This is the same word used for the Holy Spirit, and it's knowing deep in our soul, that we are not alone in our suffering, that we have One who comes alongside, helping, advocating, empowering and loving us, that gives the mystical mojo to our determination and creates a HOPE that doesn't disappoint.

As we enter a new calendar year still struggling to find a new normal in circumstances so very abnormal from that which was familiar, it is my prayer that you will find the courage to press on and that as you do so, you'll know that you're not alone. That when things feel the most down, that you'll choose to look up and be mindful of the divine presence all around you. That you'll choose to move ahead, not limping alone, but leaning on the "everlasting arms" of God, felt in the flesh of people of faith who walk with you. It's my prayer that together we'll find, cling to and share HOPE in 2022.

Blessings, *Pastor Scot*

Save
the
Date



Sunday, February 13, 7pm to
Monday, February 14, 12noon

5th-8th grade

Cost: \$20

Fun Field Trip - Movie - Mission Project



CHURCH CALENDAR

TUESDAY, January 11th - 6:30pm
Deacon's Meeting - Fellowship Hall

WEDNESDAY, January 12th - 6:30pm
Business Meeting - Sanctuary

TUESDAY, January 18th - 10:30am
Super Seniors - Fellowship Hall

SATURDAY, January 22nd - 9:00am
Super Seniors - Fellowship Hall

SUNDAY, January 23rd - 11:00am
Men's Sunday

SERMONS & TEXTS FOR JANUARY, 2022

January 2nd: (Communion Sunday)

Text: John 1:35-51

Title: "Hope: See for Yourself"

Focus: Just as Jesus challenged two interested followers and Phillip challenged Nathaniel, so too are we challenge to come and see Jesus for ourselves – learning who he truly is and what that means for us day to day.

January 9th:

Text: John 2:1-11

Title: "Hope: You Saved the Best 'Til Now"

Focus: Jesus dances into a tough situation and it is in that seemingly hopeless situation that he brings out the very best, reminding us that he can bring out the best in us even in the toughest times.

January 16th: M. L. King, Jr. Weekend - (Guest Preacher)

Text: John 2:13-25

Title: "Hope: Making Changes that Matter"

Focus: On this weekend, celebrating a beloved Baptist preacher and the calls for justice he brought, we find that he found his example in Jesus – who calls for radical justice in shocking ways.

January 23rd: Men's Sunday

Text: John 3:1-21

Title: "Hope: Love Gave"

Focus: Even the wisest struggle to grasp God's grace and its power to transform from the inside out. God so loved us that God gave, and in so doing we are made new. That's worth celebrating!

January 30th:

Text: John 4:1-23

Title: "Hope: For All"

Focus: You are known by the company you keep, and Jesus kept his with people no one else would. This passage reveals Jesus' barrier breaking love and how it changes the world, and it calls us to do the same.