

## “Hope Does Not Disappoint”

### Romans 5: 1-5

It is funny how things have a way of working out in our lives. Never could I have imagined that a Scripture I picked months ago would be exactly what we would need to hear today. When I picked out this Scripture, I was really just looking at a small snippet of Paul’s letter to the Romans, a small sample in which he was trying to give them reassurances as they experienced their world being turned upside down. Never could I imagine how needed Paul’s words written some two thousand years were for us today.

Let me explain: On Tuesday as I sat down to work on sermon stuff, it also happened to be KY primary election day. No, I promise this is not a political sermon. The reason I bring this fact up is because I was struck by the comments that I saw on social media that day. On that particular day, Facebook was even friendly enough to create a button for our profile pictures just so we could let everyone know that we voted.

On Tuesday, there was such excitement and energy...well until the next day when the results came out. But it wasn’t just the results that changed the tone of the day. It was also reported that only 17.3 % of eligible KY voters actually voted in the primary. 17.3%! Once again, I promise I’m not talking politics.

What struck me about this number is how quickly it inspired everyone to go from excitement and energy to gloom and doom. Where once there was positive comments sharing our hopes and dreams on Twitter and Facebook, all of that was replaced with comments that predicted the end of the world. There were even comments that proclaimed all hope was lost for us as a nation.

As I read over these comments, wondering what exactly God was trying to tell me in that moment, a friend posted a video of a pastor, sharing a piece of a sermon. In this sermon, he addresses the whole group but specifically he focused on the people who are 45 years and older.

I won't go into detail about this particular sermon. I can send you a link if you are interested in seeing the whole piece but what caught my attention is that he basically said, "Look, stop scaring the children. The younger generation will take their cues from us. And if all we worry about is placing our hopes and dreams onto one particular candidate, one particular economic system, one particular election, then we have forgotten why we gather each week as a community of faith. We have forgotten that our hope is grounded in something so much bigger than any election, any candidate, any one worldly thing. Our hope is grounded in our God.

The pastor goes on to say that, regardless of what happens in our world, good or bad, even if it seems all hope is lost, as people of faith we must always remember: Hope in God never fails.

Let me tell you, it is so nice when someone else does the hard work of writing the sermon for you.

This guy is right. As people of faith, we have a different narrative to tell, a narrative that is not filled with gloom and doom. But rather our faith narrative is filled with stories that constantly tell us our God is a God of abundance, stories that are filled with examples that remind us that our God is a God of grace and love so much so that we can't contain all the good stuff that flows from these gifts. Our narrative as people of faith reminds us that although we are citizens of this world, we are first and foremost citizens of the Kingdom of God, and that kingdom that is built on the promises of God, promises that never fail, promises that never disappoint. Which brings us back to our text....

Do you realize that in just these five few verses, we have been given keys to the Kingdom, the keys being, as people of faith, we are called to always remember that Hope in God never ever disappoints. That's it. In a nutshell, that is the foundation of our faith.

Now, I know this sounds like a cliché but before we dismiss it, I want us to take a look at what Paul is really saying here.

When Paul gave this advice to the people in Rome, Paul was speaking out of his own experience. Paul wants the group to know that living out his calling has not always been easy for him. Instead more often than not, he has experienced suffering because of his work trying to share the Gospel message. He has been beaten. He has been thrown in jail. He has been shipwrecked. He has had everything taken away from him, all because he was a committed follower of Jesus Christ in a time when that was not looked upon too highly. Nowadays in our nation, people talk about being persecuted for their faith. They have no idea.

As an apostle, Paul lived day in and day out, not knowing if he was going to see the next day. Unlike today, he wasn't the pastor of a mega church where he preached to thousands of people each Sunday. When he was spreading the Gospel message, Paul didn't get to stay in luxury hotels or eat in five star restaurants or have private jets. And there certainly wasn't any such thing as business class with complimentary drinks. More often than not, it was the other way around for Paul. Usually when he came into a town, he was just hoping that he could just stay on people's couches and possibly not get thrown in jail. Paul was usually as low as he could be on his travels.

Usually when Paul entered the town, he was immediately treated and seen as an outcast. He even had stones thrown at him a few times. More often than not, he was run out of town all because people didn't like what he was saying. Being a follower of Jesus Christ, living out the Gospel message of Welcome was not easy for Paul. Because of his vocation, because of his calling, because of his commitment to Christ, Paul knew darkness. He knew disappointment. He knew what it was like to be at the bottom of the barrel.

So when he tells people, to go on and have hope in God during the good times as well as in bad times, he knows what he is talking about. He is speaking from experience. Because this phrase, "Hope in God does not disappoint" was not just words to him. It was a description of a way of life for him. These words were what shaped how he lived out his faith. These words were what shaped how he perceived God working in this world. This phrase, "Hope in God does not disappoint" was what gave Paul strength to continue the journey.

Now, Paul probably would have been the first to admit that life would have been so much easier for him if he had just ignored his calling and gone back to the life he knew before he knew Christ. But he couldn't do that. He was no longer that person. He had been changed, changed by God's love and grace. And this change, this transformation was not an experience that he was willing to forget, just for the sake of an easier, seemingly simpler life.

So he made a choice and that choice opened him up to a new way of being. It freed him from the gloom and doom. This transformation opened his eyes to God's grace and God's love in his midst. This understanding gave him a new narrative to share with all of God's creation. The same narrative that we all have as well.

Hope in God never, ever disappoints. These aren't just words. They are a way of being. They are a way of living out our lives, trusting in God, centering ourselves in the presence of God, having our starting point always be the grace and love of God, no matter what.

You see, when Paul shares this advice with the people in the Roman church, when he shares these words with us some two thousand years later, he is not being naïve or unrealistic. He is sharing with us the very foundation of his faith. He is giving us a testimony to how God has act in his life in the past, how God continues to act in his life now and how God has promised to act in his life in the future.

And we are called to do the same. We are called to testify to how God has worked in our lives, time and time again, to bring light to our darkness, to bring hope to our despair, how God has surprised us time and time again with God's grace and God's love, gifts that have no end.

And that's what I want us to do right now. Take a few minutes and think about all the times God's love has surprised you when you least expected it. Think about all

the times when God's grace renewed your spirits and restored your heart. Think about all the time when hope in God did not disappoint you.

Now keep all that in mind...Because I'm about to make a shameless plug.

Today is Stewardship Sunday. That time when the leadership of this congregation asks all of us to respond to the gifts of God's grace and love with our own gifts, our own tithes and offerings.

But I'm not going to do that today. You see, usually when we ask this, people think we are asking everyone to support this institution. To keep the lights on, and the building looking good for us on Sunday mornings.

So I'm not going to ask you to fill out your pledge cards with that particular goal in mind. What I'm going to ask is that you keep in mind all the times when as a community of faith, hope in God did not disappoint.

I could mention the very first time a while back when the visioning team was putting together a vision and mission statement. The statements all looked good on paper. They still look good on paper But soon they became more than just words to us. They became a way of life for us. They become how we perceive God working in this world. This words of service and welcome have become ways that constantly and continually shaped how we live out our faith as a community. 10 years ago, when this mission of Welcome was laid upon our hearts, we all felt good about how

the statements turned out but we had no idea what living out this mission and vision of welcome really meant.

Over the years together, we had learned and discovered what it means to be a community of Welcome for all of God's children. A community where all means all, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation. No it has not always been easy. We had our ups and downs. And Yes, Sometimes it did feel like we were flying by the seat of our pants, but, but as a community of faith, we never seemed to forget that God was and is in the process, constantly guiding us, constantly leading us, constantly challenging us to be the community of WELCOME that God has called us to be.

I stand before you and I fully admit I don't know where God is calling us next. However, I will say that I feel the Spirit moving and stirring. And I think we are experiencing some growing pains right now. Maybe not in numerical growth but definitely in spiritual growth. Over the last ten years, we have come so far from where we first started. There is some good energy and excitement of possibilities for the future for this community of faith but I do wonder if we are really ready to take that next step.

I fully admit I don't have all the answers but what I do know is that God has not failed us in the past. And God is not about to start right now.

That's why I am asking the leadership of MCC to come forward and as an act of faith, as an act of trust, and yes as an act of hope, I am asking that the leadership of MCC, all the elders as the spiritual leadership of this congregation, and the officers as the administrators of this congregation, to come forward and put our pledge cards in the offering plates, not as signs that we are supporting this institution but as signs that we believe enough, and trust enough in the gifts of God's love and grace to say we are all in... we are all in behind this mission of Welcome. We are all in behind this vision of being a Christ center community that continues to build on our historical mission of loving God and one another in atmosphere of spiritual growth, witness and worship. I ask this group to come forward and put our pledges in as signs that we as people of faith, and especially as people connected to the community of Midway Christian Church, that we have been given a new narrative, a narrative that has opened our eyes and continues to open our eyes to God's Kingdom in our midst. We have been given a new narrative that is filled with stories, filled with examples that remind us over and over again that our God is a God of abundance, that our lives are filled with God's love and God's grace, so much so that we cannot contain all the good stuff that follows from these life-transforming gifts.

For all us, as people of faith, but especially as people connected to the community of Midway Christian Church, we have been given a new narrative that calls us to live out our mission of Welcome in big and small ways by showing this

community, by showing this nation, by showing this world that hope in God never ever disappoints. Amen.