

November 1, 2009

Scripture: Isaiah 25: 6-9

Sermon: "Wipe Away the Tears from All Faces"

A sense of Hope. That is really all we want in life. A sense of Hope that will strengthen us, lift us up, and comfort us. A sense of hope that will give us courage for the journey that will assure us that this is no it.

This sense of hope finds its way into the very ethos of our culture. It is the foundation of our faith. It is our first waking thought that greets us every morning. A sense of hope.

Hope for a better tomorrow. Hope for a peaceable kingdom. Hope for injustice to cease. Hope for a world where there will be no more suffering, no more violence, no more war, and no more tears.

It is this gift of hope that we have been given as Christians through our faith. It is this gift of hope that we experience through the death, resurrection and new life of Christ. It is this gift of hope that we proclaim as people of faith.

And as I moved through the week, I kept coming back to this text in Isaiah where we hear the promise that one day, God will spread out a banquet, and not just any banquet, a banquet of amazingly rich foods, a promise where God will tear the shroud of mourning that surrounds God's people, a promise where God will swallow up death, a promise where God will wipe every tear away.

A promise of new life. A promise of healing. A promise of wholeness.

And I kept thinking: Wow! What a great message! It is such a simple message! This sermon writes itself!

This is the best message that we can hear again today as a community of faith and need to hear again today. Everything is going to be okay. We don't know when or how but everything is going to be okay. Because we hold to the promise that one day, God will wipe away our tears. As a community of faith, we have had a rough year, communally and individually. We have had a lot on our plates: surgeries, deaths, retirements, frustrations, worries about jobs, worries about money, and uncertainty. Some of us have lost loved ones and their names have been added to the list of saints who have gone on before us while others of us have lost loved ones in a different way. Our loved ones are here physically but mentally we lost them years ago. Some of us still grieve deeply our loss because our loss is so new while others have had months, weeks, and years to ease the pain.

And it is just not loss of loved ones that we have faced this year. There are other losses that we have experienced. We have watched our bodies age and break down and we have wondered when the warranty expired. We have mourned the loss of the perception that parents will always be there to care for us, will always be strong, and will always be our caretakers. It is rough spot

to be in when we realize that those roles have reversed and we admit that there is grief in this situation.

Among the other losses in our lives, We have mourned and continue to mourn the loss of security and we recognize that we are entering into a brave new world, where the rules are different, things that we counted on to be there are not always, and we are treading new, sometimes scary waters.

As a community of faith, we have had and continue to have a lot on our plates as a community and as individuals. And the best message that we can hear again this morning is that we are not alone. God is with us, holding us in the palm of God's hand. And to hear the voices of the saints reassuring us that everything will be okay. We may not know when or where or how but everything will be okay because we hold to the promise that there will come a day when God will wipe all the tears away.

Because that is the God we have experienced in our lives. Because that is the God that we have experienced in our faith. A God who knows our comings and our goings. A God who holds us in the palm of God's hand. A God who says Be Still and Know that I am God. And that is what gives us strength for the journey ahead. That is what gives us courage to continue in faith. That is what gives us hope as people of faith. We hold to the promises of God and we have hope.

Because we have experienced God's goodness and God's grace in our lives. Because we have experienced God's steadfast love in our lives. Because we have experienced God's faithfulness to God's promises in our lives.

It is this gift of hope that we are given as Christians through our faith. It is this gift of hope that we experience through the death, resurrection and new life of Christ. It is this gift of hope that we proclaim as people of faith.

Because We know that we will come through on the other side. God is with us and we are surrounded by friends, family, and the communion of saints who walk with us, who grieve with us, and who celebrate with us. We know that everything will be okay. We may not know how or when or where but we know that everything will be okay because we hold to the promise that there will come a day when God will wipe away our tears.

Because of this gift of hope, we as believers in Jesus Christ can claim and live out in our present day lives. And because of this gift of hope, we can live out our lives here on earth as the people that God created us to be. Because of this gift of hope, we have strength for the journey ahead. And that is the Good News that the prophet Isaiah is sharing today.

When we take a look at Isaiah's community, we learn that they are facing some rough and uncertain times. Isaiah's community is facing the realities of exile. Homes are destroyed. Families separated. Temple destroyed. Worlds shattered. Bodies broken. Stability gone. Where is the good news now? What do they hope for now? How do they go on when it feels like they are shrouded in darkness and have lost their way?

Isaiah's community is broken. The reality his community faces is not up-lifting. And the joy, the hope, the experience of new life is being drained from his community.

So Isaiah reminds them of God's promises to them as God's people once more. He reminds them that God is steadfast in God's love, that God's mercy will roll down like waters, making everything new. Isaiah reminds his community that God continues to be with them. He reminds them that everything is going to be okay. They may not know when or where or how but everything is going to be okay because they can hold onto the promise that there will come a day when there will be no more tears.

He reminds his community that they have been given a gift, a gift of hope that is centered in God's steadfast love and tenderness.

And that this hope is not just the hope that says, well maybe we will wait around and hope for something better. Isaiah says that the hope of God, the hope that we have as people of faith, the hope that we proclaim is an active hope because "at the heart, hope is not about a promise that all things will end up happy and that we just need to wait. At the heart, hope is a challenge to do something about ourselves and the world."

That is the good news that Isaiah's community need to hear and that we need to hear again today!

We are not alone. God is with us. There will come a day when God will spread a feast out before all of God's children, before all the nations. There will come a day when God will shred the cloak of mourning that darkens our world and blocks out the light. There will come a day when God will swallow up death and will wipe away all our tears. There will come a day when God will heal the brokenness of our hearts and our souls.

There will come a day when our losses will be no more! Everything will be okay. And what better news can we hear again today! Who gets tired of hearing that we are not alone, that we are held in the palm of God's hand, and that there will be a day where God will wipe away our tears. Who gets tired of hearing that there will be a day when there will be no more pain, no more suffering, and no more losses?

There will be a day when God will wipe away our tears.

And until that day, we are called to be a people of hope because we have experienced God's steadfast love and tenderness in our lives. We have experienced God's faithfulness to God's promises. We have experienced and been given the gift of grace as God's children. And we know this world does not have the last word.

We have been given the promise that There will come a day when God will wipe away all our tears. And until that day, we are called to live an authentic faith here today in our present reality that finds strength and encouragement and hope from the future possibilities of the Kingdom of God. We are called to live out our vision of authentic faith here on earth by offering up opportunities to all of God's children for healing, for grace, for peace, for love.

There will come a day when God will wipe away all our tears. And until that day, we are called to shape a way of living that incorporates worship, justice, peace into everything that we do.” We are called to let this world know that we are Christians by our love. We are called to live lives of authentic faith by recognizing the image of God found in all of God’s children, by making justice for all of God’s creation, by praising God from whom all blessings flow. We are called to share the hope of God’s Kingdom with all by living in true relationship with all of our brothers and sisters through Christ.

Because “while we [haven’t been] given an earthly means for overcoming all disasters, tragedies, we [have been] given a glimpse of a world in which death is swallowed up forever and God will wipe away the tears from all faces.”

There will come a day when God will wipe away all our tears and until that day we are called to be people of hope because we have experienced God’s goodness and God’s grace in our lives and we know that God is faithful in God’s promises.

So As we come, remember, and name our losses over the past year, we know that God is with us, walking beside us, and holding us in the palm of God’s hand. We know that this too will past. We know that we are surrounded by friends, family, and a communion of saints who watch over us, love us, guide us, and share with us. We know that everything is going to be okay. We may not know when or how or where. we have been given a gift: the gift of hope that is grounded in God’s steadfast love and tenderness. And so we hold to the promise that There will be a day when God will wipe away our tears. And we have strength for the journey ahead.

There will come a day when God will wipe away our tears. Thanks be to God! Amen.

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