

# “Hope does not disappoint us”

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Youth Sunday

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*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.*

*And not only that, but 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.*

*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

*Romans 5:1-8*

*Holy Wisdom, Holy Word.*

***Thanks be to God.***

A few weeks ago, Allison came to me and asked if I would like to speak for Youth Sunday. I, to be honest, wasn't sure at first. The community of Market Square is absolutely wonderful, but from a purely faith-based angle, I'm not nearly as involved as I could be. I got sent the passages for this week however, and I was really struck by what was just read to you all. I attached to the message of hope in particular as it relates to one particular interpersonal thing I've been dealing with, but also to the message of perseverance and growth on a much larger level as it relates to my own personal story. I'll touch on that more later...

First, I want to reiterate this line; “Hope does not disappoint us.” That's the line I was first drawn to when I read the scripture for today. Hope, truly, will never disappoint. It

may disguise what it has coming for you, but whatever is on the other side will be good. I'm gonna be so honest, I need that reassurance myself every so often. Everyone does, even the people that are the most "put together" have moments in which they question what exactly the future will hold.

There is something so symbolic about a message of hope. Part of, in my opinion, why the newest James Gunn *Superman* film did so well is because it painted hope as being "Punk Rock," and that's something a lot of people resonated with. We so often see hope and kindness painted in the media as being soft emotions, but in *Superman* we see them exemplified by an incredibly strong figure who still just seeks out the best in humanity.

On a separate but related idea, Open Stage recently did a production of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and it carried a similar Punk and 80s inspired theme. It's interesting across all manner of pop culture to see that kindness and faith has become something akin to punk style, being framed as this out-of-the-box outlook on things, rather than the norm.

Something that strikes me as a moment in the musical, but also in the actual biblical story is the innate forgiveness in Jesus' final moments. There's an innate belief that humanity at its core is good. We see it with Clark Kent in *Superman* as well. The belief that everyone and everything is worth saving, and that human life is precious. Even in older characters carrying the name Kent, such as in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, there is a massive theme of faith in what you follow and hope for the future and that things will get better.

Something that always strikes me in the overarching biblical story is the shift in the attitude towards men as a species by God and the higher powers. We go from seeing the wrath thrown down as floods and plagues, to a rather stark forgiveness as a whole. The core of that change lies in the fact that same love of God that gives us hope is also shared by God himself. A love for his own creation despite it not always deserving it.

"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." *Christ*, directly from the old Hebrew, means "The Anointed One". Anointed in oil, the waters of baptism, and finally his own blood, but also by hope. By hope and divine purpose. Hope and trust that even while we were in sin, we would amend ourselves to honor his sacrifice and the word he spoke to us. That we would become clean in the belief that all life is sacred, just as he preached to his followers, and still tells us through the Bible today.

On the idea that all life is sacred, Happy Pride. The passage regarding "suffering, endurance, character, and hope" I find fits well for this month, both for Pride and Men's Mental Health month. In a time during which we see faith turned back against so many

of those same people that Christ had hope in, it's an important time to look at where those patterns of belief come from. It certainly isn't the Bible I've read and the word I've heard spoken out in those pews. That really is part of what makes Market Square such a special and welcoming place, our collective ability to be open to what and whoever walks through the door.

During his campaign for a seat in the US House of Representatives, James Talarico (a Presbyterian Seminarian himself), made an appearance on Stephen Colbert, and had an interesting discussion about Christian Nationalism and where it's been going wrong. He quotes the gospel of Mathew: "He tells us exactly how we're going to be saved... 'by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, by welcoming the stranger'... nothing about going to Church, nothing about voting... it was all about how you treat other people." A while later, he drops what I consider an absolutely great line, which is this: "When the church gets too cozy with political power, it loses its prophetic voice." The same voice that draws Stan and Allison up here in front of all of you, and that draws you all here to listen, is losing its power. I think some of my generation has been receding from the concept of church as a whole, because of that very loud and often very wrong small group of people who have poisoned the well, so to speak, of faith for them.

I mentioned earlier in the sermon how the message of perseverance relates to my own personal life, and it really does. If you've been a member of the congregation for a while and know my dad, I'm sure you have heard pieces of the story across the past 18 years. I was born incredibly premature, and it is a statistical improbability that I'm standing up here talking to all of you like I am now. There were times in the first few months of my life where my parents were told not to leave the hospital overnight cause there was a chance I wouldn't make it until morning. There were times when doctors and nurses went above their station or even broke a certain chain of command in order to get me the best care I needed when I was small. Just in acts like that, taking risks for another person, we see that there is immense hope and even a divine faith that things will work out, despite the odds seeming against it. By some amount of divine providence and by the immense work from a huge team of medical professionals, I didn't just make it out of the hospital, but I've performed outdoor theatre for years and am headed to Chicago to keep studying theatre professionally. Even just in that decision there, there is an immense amount of hope that the dominoes will fall into place and allow me to continue to do what I love. There's hope in all of you sitting out there, that's why you're here listening to me go on about how comics and musicals are all referential to principles of faith. You all have hope in our generation that we can manage to change course on a worldwide scale. There is so much unrest in civil and political spheres across the world, and it ultimately will fall to us to solve it all. We need to, as the scripture says today, look at and boast in our own suffering to know what we have to do next.

You remember that phrase from history class? "if you don't learn the past, you are destined to repeat it."? I do believe that to be true, but I think we need to not just look at that quote through the lens of the bad things that have happened. The hope and

perseverance of the past can also be used as a model for the present day. We see that each day in the way people protest what they find unjust and spread the news that most media won't. It's taken different forms, social media, livestreams, and it's also kept the old ways, flyering, passing info books known as 'zines, and good old-fashioned protest. I know there's been a stark shift in what I talked about over the course of the past few minutes, but I think it's important to see both the good and the not so good to the concept of hope and looking both back and forward. Both are important on the small scale, and in the grand scheme of things to show that it will always get better. It will get better. We might not always know how, but it will. I can promise you that.

To draw again to the scripture for just a moment, it's the quote on the cover of the bulletin for today. "For a good person someone might actually dare to die." I know all the death imagery is a bit grim, but that quote is quite an important one in the context of the whole passage. It reaffirms again the belief that we are, at our core, good. And for that, Jesus was willing to die and set everything that follows in motion. If Jesus and God himself did not have faith and hope in us, he would not have been willing to give his life for us to be saved and forgiven.

To close, I just want to leave you with this message. Boast in your hope. Boast in the fact that others have hoped in you and boast in your own hope for yourself and for your future. There is so much negativity in the world around us and in the media that we consume, that finding the moments which give hope are immensely powerful, so go with hope, and go with the love of God surrounding you. Thank you.