



## ***“Bringing Hope When we are at the End of our Rope”***

**Theme: Church Status - It's Complicated!**

Sermon Scripture: Psalm 40:1-8

**Weekly Memory Verse:** *“I put all my hope in the Lord.”* Psalm 40:1a (Common English Bible)

**Family Activity for the Week:** Psalm 40:1-8 is full of beautiful imagery! This week take a walk together as a family. It can be a new route or a well-worn path. Look all about you. Discuss the things you notice with one another. Where are there shadows? Where is there light? What is beautiful in your sight? What is not so pleasing to look at? While on your walk find a rock that interests you. (Make sure it is a rock that is manageable in size and preferably on the return trip to your car/house!) Once home, wash the dirt off each of your rocks and sit down with some paints. Acrylics work the best, so wear smocks! Read Psalm 40:1-8 aloud twice – which word or phrase or picture stood out to you? How did it make you feel? Now, paint that on your rock and hold it as a reminder of God giving you a new song to sing!

**Monday, June 29** – Read Psalm 40:1-8 in the Common English Bible if you have one or can read it online. Verse one starts with, “I put all my hope in the LORD.” If we are honest, most of us will admit put SOME hope in God, maybe a lot. But we have jobs, family ties, retirement accounts and, you fill in the blank in which we often put our hope. Part of what makes the current pandemic frustrating is that it shows the fragility of so many of the human possessions and activities in which we tend to put our hope. The psalmist said it was folly to pay attention to “the proud” and “those who follow lies.” Instead, he called us to celebrate God’s wonderful deeds and plans.

- ▲ Scholar Eugene Peterson who wrote *The Message* version of the bible, says, “An arresting phrase in Psalm 40:6 serves admirably as a metaphor...`aznayim karitha li, literally translates to, ‘ears thou hast dug for me’...the Psalm’s poet was bold to imagine God swinging a pickax, digging ears in our granite blockheads so that we can hear, really hear, what he speaks to us.” What steps can you take to use those God-given “ears” to implant God’s hope-giving instruction deep within yourself?
- ▲ In verse 4 we read, “Those who put their trust in the LORD...are truly happy.” We’re bombarded with claims that nearly anything, from whitening toothpaste to a luxury cruise to the best new smartphone, will make us truly happy. Do you believe that the source of true happiness to which Psalm 40 pointed is more credible than the ads that barrage you from all sides? In what ways have you found a greater depth of true joy and hope by trusting in God?

**Prayer:** *Lord God, sometimes it’s hard for me to look beyond today’s circumstances, beyond even tomorrow’s problems. Keep teaching me how to focus on your wonderful deeds and your plans for us. Amen.*

**Tuesday, June 30** – Read Psalm 130:1-8. Times like now, as deaths and job losses keep mounting up, and needed wrestling with race are brought to the surface, are painful and frightening. Psalm 130 cried out to

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God “from the depths.” The psalms regularly pray from the depths which suggest a place where we are overwhelmed by suffering and oppression that is emotional, physical, and spiritual. That sounds relevant for today, doesn’t it?

- ▲ We can talk about having hope or being hopeful without implying anything about the object of our hope. The words “expect” and “wait” need an object. We expect something or wait for someone. The psalms talk about being expectant for Yahweh, the Hebrew word for God, or for Yahweh’s word. They express a waiting and almost yearning for Yahweh’s presence. How would you define the difference between trusting and hoping for God to be with you, from hoping for an economic recovery or the lifting of travel restrictions, or things going back to “normal”?
- ▲ In verses 4-6, the psalmist writes about waiting for God’s redemption, not just an abstract idea about God. The word “waiting” can also have a misleading implication. For many of us, waiting may conjure up an image of calm or being mellow. In the Old Testament, however, waiting is impatient. It implies urgency. The psalmist waited like watchmen in the darkness looking for morning light’s first gleam. And the psalmist trusted that God was just as reliable as the dawn. What helps you to count on God’s presence?

**Prayer:** Lord God, tragedies like the Covid-19 pandemic tempt me to despair. I thank you for the promise that “the worst thing is never the last thing,” and that there is dawn after every dark night. Amen.

**Wednesday, July 1** – Read Psalm 27:1-5, 14. This powerful Hebrew poem called every child of God to live without fear, which is hard in tough times. But living without fear did not mean that God would solve all immediate problems. Instead, the psalmist trusted that God was with us in any situation. When we see the word Lord in the scriptures, it’s good to remember that the word “Lord,” translates simply to, “first thing.” What we put first is our Lord. Living in hope relates to living with a focus on one thing, making it the “first thing,” not living in hope that we will be able to achieve and get everything, but living in hope of gaining the, “first thing.”

- ▲ The Hebrew language linked “hope” and “wait.” The Common English Bible used “hope” in verse 14. Other good translations chose “wait.” Israelites prayed Psalm 27 yet saw Babylon destroy Jerusalem, saw Greece and Rome conquer their land—but kept on waiting and hoping. Christians prayed Psalm 27 yet saw Jesus crucified, the apostles Paul and Peter killed—but kept on waiting and hoping. What most tests your trust and tugs you toward fear? How can you choose to wait and hope that in the end God will set you “up high, safe on a rock”?
- ▲ Verse 4 said, “I have asked one thing from the LORD... to live in the LORD’s house all the days of my life, seeing the LORD’s beauty.” The humble monk Brother Lawrence said he found hope in “seeking [God] only, and nothing else, not even His gifts.” What is helping you learn to value and praise God without making it conditional on God delivering exactly what you want?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you so often greeted your people with the words “fear not.” Teach me how to look to you as my light and my salvation even at the most frightening times. Amen.

**Thursday, July 2** – Read Hebrews 10:32 – 11:1. Jesus taught in Matthew 5:11-12 that his followers could rejoice even when they are wronged. The apostles Paul and Silas sang hymns in prison after a flogging in Acts 16:23-25. Today’s text said some of Jesus’ early followers accepted the confiscation of their possessions with joy. Clearly these Christ-followers were “banking on” the kingdom to come more than this one in which we live. Hebrews 11:1 defined their faith (and ours) as, “the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don’t see.”

- ▲ Oxford scholar Alister McGrath wrote, “Coming to faith doesn’t mean merely having a new idea. It means recognizing in our minds who God is and what God is like and responding to God in our hearts.” What experiences or people helped you to move past thinking of God as an important idea to knowing God as a loving, personal being you trust, obey, and are committed to?

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- ▲ Hebrews said its readers could accept even the confiscation of property with joy, “since you knew that you had better and lasting possessions.” In what “better and lasting possessions” had those first-century Christians put their confidence? To what extent can you, too, have those better and lasting possessions to anchor your security in life? How can you increase your “inventory” of those possessions?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, you call me to trust that your spiritual world truly is more real, joyful and free than the material world that’s always tugging at my heart. Keep growing that faith deep within me. Amen.*

**Friday, July 3** – Read Romans 5:1-5. The apostle Paul outline the spiritual process through which every Christ-follower can have a character that meets life’s dark twists and turns with hope and trust, not despair. Greek literature told stories in which humans grew more noble through terrible suffering. Paul, too, said that as we meet trouble with God’s grace and hope, we grow. But Pastor John Ortberg noted, “At the end he added as a climax what would never have occurred to a noble pagan: ‘and character produces hope.’”

- ▲ Have you ever experienced the progression Paul described bringing you to a powerful sense of God’s love being “poured out” in your heart? Later in Romans, Paul wrote in Romans 15:13, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in faith so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” How close to “overflowing” is your inner supply of hope today in this crisis time? How can you open your heart and let God fill you to overflowing with hope?
- ▲ In Paul’s day, a “realist” would have said the Christian message he preached wouldn’t even alter the actions of the invincible Roman Empire, much less outlast it. 2000 years later we can see how “realistic” that was. Do you tend to lean more to the view that hope is a largely wishful mirage, or to Paul’s view that hope, based on God’s saving love, is a vital element of strong character? What role has hope played in keeping you going at tough times, including now?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I like the image of overflowing with hope—but, many days, my reservoir gets low. Keep me attuned to your power. Shape me into a fountain of hope for myself and those around me. Amen.*

**Saturday, July 4** – Read Lamentations 3:18-26. The writer of today’s passage lived through a great tragedy when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem. It was as though on September 11, 2001, a huge army of enemies had leveled and burned not just some buildings, but all of Washington, D.C. and New York. It was as though a tiny highly contagious virus had killed thousands and sent unemployment skyrocketing and stock prices plunging. It was as though the actions witnessed on television and social media of an arrest that ended in murder charges began a firestorm of calls for reform and recognition of racial pain.

- ▲ Amid the bodies and the rubble, the writer of Lamentations did not deny or hide the pain of the experience, expressing very raw emotions in verse 19. Yet he still voiced a gritty trust in God: “I have hope... great is your faithfulness... It’s good to wait in silence for the LORD’s deliverance.” Have you been able to be honest about your emotions during this time? What has helped you to do that? What has held you back?
- ▲ Verse 23 says God’s compassions are renewed every morning. Pastor John Guest wrote about this verse, “the grieving mind was learning to live one day at a time. It is an art we all must learn, but it is a difficult one. We would much rather see the burden removed once and for all.” In grief, we often begin to doubt that things will ever get better. But the painful sense of loss we call grief is not a reason to abandon hope; it is why we desperately need hope. What losses are you feeling most sharply today? What experiences, relationships and words of Scripture can anchor you daily to God’s loyal, never-ending love, and bring you the hope that waits for the LORD’s deliverance even in the most desolate of times?

**Prayer:** *Lord God, your compassions are renewed this morning. If I am honest, I wish you would have removed all the burdens overnight. But now, I ask you to help me wait in hope for your deliverance. Amen.*

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