



Theme: Church Status – It's Complicated
"Bringing Hope When We're at the End of our Rope"

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

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Scripture: Psalm 40: 1-8

VIDEO Sermon Starter

SLIDE Bringing Hope When We're at the end of Our Rope

This past week we were sitting around with a few of our staff and I was sharing some of my experiences in my first job at Taco Bell. This was when it was not about their value menu. Our staff arrived at six in the morning to prepare the meat and the beans and cut up the tomatoes, the lettuce, cheese and even olives. Everything was fresh and not from a bag. I was 17 years old and had a motorcycle, so I often took the late shift and was a closer with another woman on our crew. **You haven't really experienced life until you closed a fast food restaurant at midnight on a Friday or Saturday.** On one occasion, just as we were closing, a man came into the store wearing nothing but his tightie-whities, which is underwear for those of you who are unsure. He ordered a couple of tacos and I simply made them for him and gave them to him so he would leave the store. At the end of the day we often throw out most of the extra food anyway or sat around and had a burrito or taco ourselves. My coworker told me that was a good idea too because **we weren't sure where he was keeping his money!**

I lived in a small town in the East Bay about 30 minutes from San Francisco and there wasn't much in our community open late at night. The only other fast food restaurant was **Jack-in-the-Box** and several months later, once again around closing, there was a man walking down Main Street with his Jack-in-the-Box shirt, boxer shorts and socks with a file drawer tied to his hands. He was very distraught, and my coworker knew him, so we opened the door and let him in. It turns out he was robbed at gunpoint and then tied with a rope to the filing cabinet. After the perpetrators left, he was able to get the file drawer out of its cabinet and ended up walking several blocks down to our store. He said he knew someone would find him because his boss needed the contents of that filing cabinet. So, if nothing else, someone would come looking for that!

It was one of the few robberies in our town and it changed how we operated at our store. It also made us nervous when we closed, knowing there was someone willing to commit that kind of robbery in our town. We now always had to have at least two of us closing the store and there were other safety precautions put in place. I was thinking about that experience this week partly because **we now are living in a time when everything is changing, and many safety precautions are in place that were never an issue before.** We are looking at not only changes in behavior around the **pandemic** but also **police reform** and other issues that connect with **racial injustice that is clear we need to address as a culture.**

Sometimes, in the middle of these moments of radical change in shifting, it can feel like everything is moving under our feet and **it's hard to get our footing.** Our anxiety goes through the roof and there is a sense of fear that can overwhelm us. **Over the past few months, I have heard several people talk about being at the end of their rope,** a phrase we often use when life feels overwhelming. I have heard **students** use that phrase when they were trying to figure out how to hold graduations, or they hadn't seen

their friends in weeks. I have heard **parents** who were thrust into the role of homeschooling say, **“I feel like I’m at the end of my rope.”** I have heard those who **run businesses** and those who are **out of work** under this phrase. I have visited with friends with **black and brown skin** use this phrase, as well as those in law enforcement.

I got to thinking about that young man who was tied to the filing cabinet drawer with the rope and how it is that we **sometimes feel tied down or restricted because of the overwhelming this of life.** To be at the end of our rope is something that many of us have experienced, when we lose patience or all sense of hope. One of the purposes of this sermon series is to remind us of **what it means to be the church during these challenging times.** We still are called to **be Jesus Christ the world** and for us as a congregation that means three things in particular.

SLIDE Building Community
Changing Lives
Bringing Hope

So far, we talked about **building community one relationship at a time** and next week will talk about changing lives and how we can experience transformation, becoming like Christ. **Today we are going to talk about bringing hope even when we are at the end of our rope.** I hear from many that they are looking for **hope right now**, which is why we did in entire series of sermons on this particular topic shortly after the pandemic set in.

The truth is that we are all looking for hope. **We need hope.** Hope is what **keeps us going.** Hope is what **gets us up in the morning.** Hope is what **helps us to show up and suit up.** I would argue that **we cannot survive without hope.** Hope is what **keeps us from giving up.** Every human needs hope to survive.

Sometimes we use hope in a **more casual way**, like when we say, “**I hope it rains** tomorrow because we need the moisture.” Or when it’s our birthday we say, “I hope someone **gets me an Xbox 360.**” Or we hope for **something for dinner** which is our favorite food. I would say that’s more like **wishful thinking**. When we talk about bringing **hope**, we are talking about something **much deeper**. We talked during the sermon series on hope about the fact that it is a verb as well as a noun and I gave you this definition which I heard recently, and I thought was helpful.

SLIDE Hope is choosing to believe and act as if the future will be better than the present.

We talk about bringing hope, the idea is that we **choose to work** so that we will help the future become better than the present. If we are going to commit to being the presence of Jesus Christ the world then we are going have to work towards that and be a part of what God is doing in the world. **Hope is not just something we believe but something we will act upon.**

The Psalms speak often about hope and often the Israelites were dealing with, what felt like to them and would be like us, hopeless circumstances. I remind you that the word **Psalms** means **song** and the book of Psalms was the **prayer and worship book** of the Jewish people and the early church. It was the hymnbook and the prayer book all wrapped into one.

I was **walking in the dog park this week** and I ran into a friend of mine who is racially Jewish but not religiously Jewish. Judaism is unique in that it is both a race and religion and a culture. I’ve known this friend for the 18 years I’ve lived in Durango and he recently had some surgery and was telling me about this device which I received after I had hip replacement surgery a couple of years ago. They have you breathe in it and it tells you how your breath is doing. He was telling me that since his surgery, which was pretty major, he **hasn’t been able to get this ball in the device as high** as he would

like. We talked about the effects of **trauma and anxiety in our life** and how when that happens, our **breathing becomes shorter and shallow** and we forget to take deep breaths. **Taking deep breaths is critical when we are experiencing anxiety or fear.**

Before his surgery, our congregation did a prayer quilt for him with Psalm 23 on it. He still has the quilt hanging in his house. So, we talked about the **Psalms and how they were originally meant to be sung and in doing that it helps the Jewish people to breathe during times when they were enslaved and in exile and unsure when they would be able to return home and live as free people again.** Psalms and singing would help them take deep breaths. I also shared with him something I have shared with those of you who have done live morning devotions online with me during this pandemic. I learned this from a chiropractor to help lengthen your neck and stretch out your body, so you don't keep leaning forward all the time when you're in front of a computer. It also involves deep breathing and I find it helpful to do every morning.

**SLIDE You
 Will
 Live
 Taller**

The key is to make the **Y by putting your arms up in the air, outstretched and taking deep breaths.** This also is one of the postures the Israelites would use when they sang and prayed. Then, bring your arms down so you make a W and pull your shoulder blades back to both stretch and breathe deeply. Bring your hands down, keeping your elbows in to your side and once again bring the shoulder blades back and that forms a forward and backward L with your arms. Finally, put your arms straight out your side to

make a T, bending your arms toward your shoulder blades and fingers backward to get a good stretch and force you to breathe deeply all along the front of your body. I chose to change the words that go with YWLT.

SLIDE Yahweh

Will

Lead us

Through

Let's stand and do this together. I realize some of you think I'm a bit crazy, but this is part of what the Psalms were written for. I did this with my friend in the dog park so I'm pretty sure all you can do it here in Riverview Park or at home wherever you are. It's good for you and it was part of the worship of the Israelites, to sing and move your body and stretch and deep breathing. It is what helps bring hope when you can breathe then the presence of God.

The Psalms are beautiful because they encourage us to not just think about hope but to act it out and be hope. We find that in the Psalm we have chosen for us to look at today, which is Psalm 40. It is hard for me to hear this Psalm without hearing the voice of Bono, the lead singer from U2. I saw the rock band do it live at Red Rocks in Golden, Colorado when it was raining, and it felt like we were ***under a blood red sky***. I asked Ely if he could sing this for us so we can hear the Psalm sung not just read.

VIDEO "40" by Ely

**I waited patiently for the Lord
He inclined and heard my cry
He brought me up out of the pit
Out of the mire and clay**

**I will sing, sing a new song
I will sing, sing a new song
How long to sing this song
How long to sing this song
How long, how long, how long
How long, to sing this song
He set my feet upon a rock
And made my footsteps firm
Many will see
Many will see and fear
I will sing, sing a new song
I will sing...**

The Psalms are beautiful because they reflect both our sense of despair and how we turn to hope. I think of Psalm 13 which begins with these words of agony.

**BIBLE ¹ How long will you forget me, Lord? Forever?
 How long will you hide your face from me?
² How long will I be left to my own wits,
 agony filling my heart? Daily?**

Then we get to the end, and we find these words...

**BIBLE ⁵ But I have trusted in your faithful love.
 My heart will rejoice in your salvation.
⁶ Yes, I will sing to the Lord
 because he has been good to me.**

How does someone who is complaining and lamenting, finally get to this place? They are trusting in the deliverance they can't see, and they are holding on to hope in choosing that in the midst of challenging moments.

Based upon their past experience of God's faithfulness, they hold onto hope that God will be faithful again and the worst thing will never be the last thing. This is faith in the midst of the darkness. Let's remember what hope is again.

SLIDE Hope is choosing to believe and act as if the future will be better than the present.

The ancient Israelites didn't have evidence that everything would get better, much like we don't have evidence of that today. What they remembered was that God had delivered their people in the past and God will be faithful again. God is capable and faithful to deliver us if we will put our trust in God. Eventually, that deliverance did come. **Sometimes deliverance took weeks, sometimes months, and sometimes years and even generations.** They were **changed and they were different as a result of walking through the challenges of life.** People would come back to God and get serious with God about repenting and bringing good things to be a part of what God was doing in the world.

Psalm 40, that we heard sung, is translated in several different ways from the Hebrew into English. In the Common English Bible translation, we hear it this way.

**BIBLE ¹ I put all my hope in the Lord.
 He leaned down to me;
 he listened to my cry for help.
² He lifted me out of the pit of death,
 out of the mud and filth,
 and set my feet on solid rock.
 He steadied my legs.
³ He put a new song in my mouth,
 a song of praise for our God.
 Many people will learn of this and be amazed;**

they will trust the Lord.

There is a sense of **joy and deliverance** that God has just done this amazing thing. I was sinking down in the mire in the muck. I was this pressed and despondent and felt like there was no hope, but God delivered me. God deliver me because of what happened in verse one.

BIBLE ¹ **I put all my hope in the Lord.**

I think of all the people I have worked with in 30 years of ministry who have gone through **divorce, job loss, the loss of a loved one, health crisis and trauma that is seemed overwhelming.** I see a very common theme in all the ones who make it through that time and that is they live out this phrase in the **put all their hope in God** and not in human things which can be so unreliable.

This Hebrew word “hope” is an interesting one because it has four different translations. The word here is “qavah.”

SLIDE **“qavah” = hopefully watching for God to act, or to wait with anticipation**

Every word for hope in Hebrew also includes the idea of waiting. While the sung version that we used was from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, which talked about **waiting patiently for the Lord**, the Common English Bible uses these words which is our memory verse for this week.

BIBLE ¹ **I put all my hope in the Lord.**

To put our hope in the Lord and to wait patiently for the Lord are the same thing. If we believe that the future will be better than the present, then that is waiting and that is being hopeful. **We wait expectantly because we believe God will act in the future and it will be different and better than the present. Hope is born in seasons of despair and discouragement** we have to wait and that is **frustrating**. Almost every single Bible passage we find which

talks about hope is in a context when things are going horrible, yet people choose to believe the future can be better than the present. **This is a biblical idea and it's what it means to have faith in something bigger than ourselves and the circumstances which we see around us right now.**

During this series of sermons, and moving into the summer, we are giving you a **Scripture memory verse** as part of your Meditation Moments each week and this one today is simple and I hope it is one that you will carry with you throughout each week. What you say this one together with me out loud or just whisper it under your breath.

BIBLE ¹ **I put all my hope in the Lord.**

I wait patiently for the Lord. I put all my hope in the Lord. When I was sinking down, I put all my hope in the Lord. If you have registered with us online for this sermon that you are in today, we will email you a meme that you can use as wallpaper on your phone. You can also post this on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. You can print it off and tape it on your mirror. You can find this link on our website with this weekend sermon as well. I hope you will see this in the morning and at night, every day, again and again. I put on my hope in the Lord because when we do that, we not only experience hope for ourselves that we find the strength to bring hope in the world.

SLIDE **Bringing Hope**

When we choose hope and then we bring it with us to share with others, we find a building in our hearts. We chose these words, "Bringing Hope," carefully as we were looking at what it means to be the presence of Christ the world. We are called not just to talk about it but to embody it and bring it with us as we seek to be the presence of Christ in the world. When we do this, we find that hope wells up inside each of us in our lives.

Over the last 2 ½ months, each week on Fridays, we have done

something called Bringing Hope. We have challenged you to give to something that will help bring hope in our community and 100% of what you have given has gone to these ministries. You have given over \$35,000 towards bringing hope in these ways...



Durango Food Bank



Manna Soup Kitchen



VOA Safehouse/Homeless Shelter



Summit Church COVID Assistance Fund



San Juan Basin Health Department



Pine River Shares



Keep Kids Reading Project providing books for kids in the summer



Navajo Hope Food Bank bringing food to families dealing with COVID



Adaptive Sports Association



Native Hope Solar Lighting Ministry bringing clean lighting to families off grid on the Navajo Nation



Durango Derailers providing cancer support for children and their families

What we believe is that God redeems even moments like this when we feel like hope is elusive. We choose to bring hope because this is what Jesus did and what God does when he sets our feet on solid ground. Hope is a choice and when we choose to believe it, hope will well up inside of us and we can bring it as part of being Jesus Christ the world. Let's say this Scripture verse again.

BIBLE ¹ I put all my hope in the Lord.

For Christians, this is not just wishful thinking, but it's rooted and grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Christ brought hope to people through healing and teaching and prayer and encouragement, and when hope seems lost in his death, he brought us resurrection and the life everlasting. In walking out of the tomb, Jesus tells us there is always hope. God redeemed Christ suffering and used it for our salvation, bringing us hope in the good news that the worst thing is never the last thing.

In 1958, there were two parents in Italy expecting their first child. They were told before he was born there was a high likelihood he would be born with **severe birth defects and he might not survive childbirth.** They still **held onto hope** that this baby would survive so they continue the pregnancy praying and believing that God would work through their child. Five months after he was born, they received devastating news that he had **genital glaucoma** and he would never see like most children. He could see shapes, but he would never be able to see the world and focus like most people. His parents still held out hope and pray for their child, that God would guide him even though he was nearly blind.

Despite his limited vision, when he was 12 years old, he was playing soccer. **The ball hit him in the head and cause a brain hemorrhage** and he lost what little sight he had left. He and his family **still chose hope that somehow God could do something with this blindness at the age of 12.** He went on to finish high school, graduated college with honors and went to **law school, receiving his law degree.** But, what he really loved to do was **sing.** He left behind his career in law and began to sing, with some of his favorite songs being spiritual and hymns and Psalms because he is a **follower of Jesus.** He will tell you that **he is not perfect and he is made lots of mistakes,** but it's **his faith in the resurrected Christ** that gives him the hope to say that

regardless of his present circumstances, he believes the future can be meaningfully better than the present. He has sold over **100 million records** and is known as one of the greatest tenors of our time.

As I was thinking about the Psalms being songs, I was reminded of the life of Andrea Bocelli. He sang this song which is one of the cornerstones of our Christian faith in an **empty Cathedral in Milan** just after Easter. I invite you close your eyes and to hear this song the way he hears it, by feeling the words and the music.

VIDEO (AUDIO outdoors) Amazing Grace by Andrea Bocelli

The title of his concert was, **“Music for Hope.”** I found Andrea’s story and him singing this song powerful and moving because he trusted his life and even his blindness to the Lord, **choosing to hope regardless of the circumstances.** Because of that, **Andrea Bocelli was able to bring hope to many and Italy on Easter weekend at the height of the pandemic for millions of people.**

Here’s a blind man singing in an empty Cathedral, **“I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind, but now I see.”** Having been through times of hopelessness and despair and disappointment and heartache in his life, Andrea saw all the ways in life that God had delivered him. God did amazing things with all that pain and brought this amazing beauty. I think what he saw is what the psalmist said in Psalm 40.

**BIBLE ¹ I put all my hope in the Lord.
 He leaned down to me;
 he listened to my cry for help.
² He lifted me out of the pit of death,
 out of the mud and filth,
 and set my feet on solid rock.
 He steadied my legs.**

³ **He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise for our God.
Many people will learn of this and be amazed;
they will trust the Lord.**

We began the sermon talking about being at the **end of our rope**. We recognize that all of us can feel like we are at the end of our rope at times in life. Maybe you have felt that way in your life recently. Maybe you have had a good cry lately over everything that's going on in the world. Maybe you felt like there was no reason to go on. I want to remind you of this word we learn today for hope that is part of the memory verse.¹ **I put all my hope in the Lord. "Qavah," = hope or to wait upon.** But I learned something this week I didn't know about the etymology of this word.

SLIDE The etymology of "qavah" means rope.

How did rope become hope, other than that they rhyme? How did rope become connected to waiting patiently upon God, hoping expectantly that God would do something to bring about relief? In what sense did rope become hope? I think this word is meant to paint a picture of a lifeline that God is handing to us. God is reaching out towards us with that rope and we take hold of it and it gives us hope. **As we take hold of that rope, there is an expectation that God is going to deliver** and there is something on the other end that we will find which will redeem and restore and bring life.

That young man who was tied by a rope to the file cabinet drawer during the burglary said he knew the owner would come to find him because what was in the **file drawer was valuable**. What's at the end of your rope? **Is it something so valuable you can put all your hope in?**

I think of the **farmers in the Midwest** who would prepare for dangerous blizzards by tying a rope from the back door of their house out to the barn as a guide to ensure they could return safely home. Their winter

storms were known to come quickly and fiercely and were very dangerous if you got trapped out in one. **When a blizzard's full force was blowing, a farmer could not see the end of his or her hand.**

Many froze to death in those snowstorms, disoriented by their inability to see in the heavy whirling snow. **They wandered in circles, lost sometimes in their own backyards.** If they lost their grip on the rope, it became nearly impossible for them to find their way home. **Some froze within feet of their own front door, never realizing how close they were to safety.**

To this day, in parts of Canada and the Great Plains, weather forecasters counsel people that, to void getting lost in the blinding snow when they venture outside, **they tie one end of a long rope to their house and grasp the other end firmly.**

We live in a crazy, busy world, and are often overcome by the blizzard of daily distractions that cause us to lose our way in the whiteout swirling around us. Add to that the storms and trials of life that blow into our lives unexpectedly and catch us off guard, and it is no wonder why so many of us are disoriented and confused. **We need a rope to lead us back home.**

I believe when God is at the other end of our rope, and we put our trust and hope holy in God, we find that God is able to take us from the muck in the mire. God can lift us up and carry us, helping us put our feet on solid ground trust in something deeper. God will carry us and sustain us and guide us through every storm. **God can deliver us and sustain us** so we can live with hope now, knowing with certainty there is a better future coming. Let's pray.

SLIDE Prayer

Gracious God, we are grateful for you. You are our hope. Hope is to grab hold of that rope, the lifeline you throw to us. In the midst of our despair and

discouragement, help us to cry out to you and hold on to the hope you offer. May we remember your steadfast love, clinging to our faith in you and knowing with certainty that you will see us through. God help us then to bring that hope to your world which is in desperate need of your word. Hopeless to wait patiently for your deliverance, trusting you with our whole heart. May we have hope, live in hope, put all our hope in you, and then bring hope to be the presence of Jesus Christ the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.