

Hope for a NEW Year

Luke 24: 13-35

1 Peter 1: 13-19

¹³ So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. ¹⁴ So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. ¹⁵ But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. ¹⁶ For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy."

¹⁷ And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as "temporary residents." ¹⁸ For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. ¹⁹ It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.

Why Do We Search For Hope?

In 1965, Navy Pilot James Stockdale became one of the first American pilots to be shot down during the Vietnam War. He spent 7 years as a Prisoner of War. His Vietcong captors tortured him frequently in order to break him and get him to denounce the U.S. He was chained for days at a time with his hands above his head so that he couldn't even swat the mosquitoes. His legs were broken, and he was held in isolation from other American POW's. How could anyone survive 7 years of that?

But as he looks back on that time, Stockdale says that it was his hope that kept him alive. Hope of one day going home, hope that each day would be his release. Without hope, he knew he would die in hopelessness, as other POW's had done.

Hope is powerful. It can keep a person going when nothing else can. Without hope we give up & die. With hope we go on. Hope is **POWERFUL!**

Today, as we begin this New Year 2021, my prayer and desire is that God strengthens you and fills you with hope.

We need hope! There's a lot of people going around these days numb, in shock. People – especially people in our area, our neighborhoods -- really need hope!

1. Some people (maybe you) are looking for hope in a relationship.
 - a. Some are single and looking for love that never seems to come their way.
 - b. Others are trying to recover from relational wounds – and the years go by and the pain is just as deep. You're giving up the hope of ever recovering, ever having joy back in your life.
2. People in our area are losing hope because of the closures and unemployment brought on by the pandemic. People who have worked hard have lost their businesses, lost their livelihoods, lost jobs. People are on the edge of giving up hope.
3. Some folks – maybe you – are looking for hope for their personal future. We are all wondering, "Will I make it through this pandemic?" "Will my family make it through

without losing one of us due to the pandemic?” “Will my family ever be the same again?”

The day after Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples were a lot like us. Two of them were walking along a road, with their heads hanging down. They were confused. They had high hopes for Jesus, but He had been crucified and buried. Then on Sunday morning, the tomb was opened by someone or something, and Jesus’ body was missing. Some women who went to the tomb early in the morning reported seeing Jesus alive. But could anyone believe that would be true? What would be next, now? All plans for the future were off the table. Talk about confusion! They sure were confused. And confusion is never hope!

We are a lot like those two men when we are confused: what’s going on? And what’s it mean for me. Aren’t we asking those kinds of questions a lot? We are entering a New Year. The pandemic is still going on? What will that mean for us? When will life go back to normal? Will it ever go back to normal again? What will this New Year hold? Confusion.

The two disciples who walked along the road out of Jerusalem were a lot like us because they were self-focused. They missed the world’s greatest event – they missed Jesus’ resurrection – because they were so focused on their own disappointments and problems. Don’t we do that too? Get so wrapped up in focusing on our problems, that we miss the big picture of what God is doing to give us hope?

Where Do We Look For Hope? So when we are confused and self-focused, when we really need hope to go on, where do we look for it?

1. **Wishful Thinking** Luke 24: 21a Some people try to find hope in wishful thinking. In the movie, *Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy is in a tough spot. No body understands her, and mean old Miss Gulch is trying to take her only friend, her dog Toto, away. Where does she look for hope? Dorothy hopes for some place “over the rainbow.” That’s a nice thought, but let’s face it – it’s only fantasy. It’s just a dream. Sometimes people look for hope in their own, made-up, wishful thinking.

The disciples did that. They pinned their hopes on their own wishful plans. **“We had hoped that [Jesus] was the One who was going to redeem Israel.”** That’s what the 2 people on the road said. They pinned their hopes on the idea that Jesus was the going to rescue them from the Romans, and be a political and military kind of Savior. Where did they get that idea? It certainly wasn’t God’s plan! It was their own wishful thinking. They were ignorant of what God had really promised in His Word, the Bible, and they created their own plans, instead of God’s plan. It was just wishful thinking. No wonder they were down when their wishes didn’t turn out!

Perhaps these days, we feel down because our wishes have been interrupted by the pandemic. We wanted Christmas, and New Year’s celebrations, and Thanksgiving to go as they always do – to go as we wanted. And they certainly didn’t. That can leave us down when our wishes don’t come true.

2. **Knowledge** 1 Peter 1: 13 Some people look for hope in wishful thinking. Others look for hope in knowledge. The Bible passage from 1 Peter 1 mentions this. Something that can happen to us is that we look for hope in empirical data, in what we know, and can figure out.

I recall from my days living in Rochester, MN, a close friend of mine was an engineer for IBM. He told me that every summer IBM threw a big company picnic on a Saturday for employees and friends. How did those engineers pick the date for their picnic? They looked at the data of what dates it rained in past years, and they picked the date with the lowest

probability of rain. I have to admit, that every year it turned out to be a nice sunny day for the IBM company picnic.

See, sometimes we can run our lives, and our hopes that same way. We say, I got it all figured out. I don't have to bother with the future because I trust in my calculations – I've plotted the interest rate and I know how my investments will provide security for my future – I've made a business plan – I've carefully analyzed the situation and figured out a reasonable solution.

I fear that many, many people are doing the same thing now with the pandemic. We keep on hearing that there is hope now, because a vaccine is approved and being shipped out. Our scientific knowledge to design and test and manufacture new drugs is our hope!

Now, don't misunderstand me. Vaccines and medical science is great and a gift from God. We should absolutely embrace this knowledge. But ... our HOPE? No. It's a drug. Like other drugs and other medical practices throughout history, it is ONLY our most recent best guess.

And we end up pinning our hopes on our intellect or our educational backgrounds – as important as those are.

3. **Emotions** 1 Peter 1: 14 Some times, we look for hope in our emotions, in what we can feel. 1 Peter 1:14 mentions "evil desires." You wake up in the morning and you say, "Man, I'm just feeling lucky today!" And our hopes go up and down each day with our emotions, because some days we're feeling great and other days we're feeling down. There's no solid hope.

Often people base their lives on their emotions when they say, "I've just fallen in love with this man or woman who isn't my spouse – I can't help myself." Others say "I've got these desires inside of me to love someone of my same sex – to enter into a gay relationship. And **God** must have put those feelings inside of me, so it **must** be the right thing for me to do." And many of us say, "Well, if they **feel** that way, who am I to say they shouldn't follow their feelings." All of that is building our lives, looking for hope in our feelings, our desires.

Just because I may have a feeling or a desire inside of me, doesn't mean that it's the right thing in God's eyes. Just because I have a feeling, doesn't mean that it's going to give me a solid hope for my life or for my eternity.

4. **Achievements** 1 Peter 1: 15 Many of us, pin our hopes on our personal achievements. We think, "I've pulled this off in the past, so, I certainly ought to be able to pull this off again." So we base our hope on what we think we can DO.

We have seen this past year how little our achievements can change our lives. I hope the lesson is sinking in. The US had a zooming economy a year ago. But that achievement didn't spare us from a year of crisis. This past year we have seen people get sick indiscriminately – regardless of age, race, wealth, or even how careful they were to wash hands and wear a mask.

All I'm saying is that putting our hopes on what we DO, is not a solid foundation for hope. Because hope is something God gives to all people by grace – by HIS doing (not ours).

Where Is Real Hope Found? One of the lessons we have learned again last year is that sickness and death come, and all of us are vulnerable to it. One day, all of us will leave this earth. So the hopes that we may have for this life, really don't last. What really, ultimately matters for each one of us is where we each look for hope for ETERNITY. That, in the end, is all that matters

You know folks, if we are only looking for hope for THIS life – to make our lives better, or our kids, or our marriages, or our jobs and finances – in the end, those hopes are only temporary. Hope for this life only is really no hope. That's what Paul was guided by God to write in the Bible. **Where is REAL Hope Found?**

1. His Resurrection

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead....” 1 Corinthians 15: 17-20

Hope that transcends this life, hope that outlasts the temporary problems and sicknesses and challenges and heartaches we face, hope that really makes a lasting difference is found, in the truth that Jesus came, was born, lived and died for you, rose again and is alive. No matter how wishful your thinking, how intelligent your plans, no matter how you feel or how much you can DO, all of that can be undone by death, and by power of the Evil One in this world. But Jesus, in His life, death, and resurrection, defeated death, sin, the devil. Lasting, solid, certain hope is ultimately found in a living person – Jesus who is alive again and forevermore.

Where is REAL Hope Found? (2) In His Word This Jesus, the Bible tells us, appeared to those 2 men who walked so hopeless on that road. He came to those 2 hopeless guys, and showed them where to look to find hope. In His Word, the Scriptures. Luke recorded that event and Luke tells us that ***“Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.”*** Luke 24: 27

We might want Jesus to come and fill US with hope in some flashy, lightning and thunderbolt way. But He comes to us in real simple, down on our level, words and promises -- in His Word, the Bible. That's why it's real important for each one of us who NEED hope every day to USE HIS WORD – individually / privately, in small groups, with family at dinner table, every weekend in worship.

In the Bible you will find **Who Jesus is:** and **What Jesus did:**

Hope is found in a personal relationship with Jesus. 1 Peter 1:20 speaks about ***“The precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world....”*** One of the most central and basic teaching of the Christian faith is that Jesus existed before Creation – that is, He is TRUE God.

That's important when it comes to looking for hope! He is not some fly-by-night guy. Jesus is God! True, eternal, never-changing, beginning of all things and end of all things – GOD! That's important when you're looking for hope!

And, when you look for hope in His Word, you will find what Jesus DID! He came down from heaven to earth for us. Lived the 100% perfect life that we don't live and can't live on our own. He credits His perfection to you! AND, then He died to take all your wrongs from you. He carried your sins to the cross. 1 Peter 1 says it this way: ***“it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life ..., but with the precious blood of Christ.”*** WOW! What a GIFT! That's where you'll find hope.

Where is real hope found? (3) in **His Meal** On that road, the LIVING Jesus came and shows us where to find hope – in His Word. And Jesus gives us hope in His meal!

“When He was at the table with them, He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him” Luke 24: 30-31

When we come to communion, this is really Jesus. Here, in the bread and wine, just as He promises. He gives you forgiveness and sets you free from whatever is in your past. He

gives His power of His Spirit, to start over again. He gives the affirmation that He's crazy about you and wants you to be His now and forever. THAT'S where He offers hope – in His Word & in His meal. And in ...

Where is real hope found? (4) in **His People** The 2 disciples on the road were off by themselves. They left the gathering of the other believers. Off by themselves, they lost the encouragement and the up-building God's people infuse in each other. God offers hope in His people – TOGETHER, not apart!

“They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when He broke the bread.” Luke 24: 33-35

Haven't we – here at St. Paul – seen that hope, that encouragement, that POWER that God offers through ONE ANOTHER – thru His people. That's where God brings hope to you!

The movie *“Shawshank Redemption”* is really all about hope. It's a terrible life for men sentenced to life in prison. Most give up hope. But one prisoner didn't. He started a library. Taught other men to get their high school GED. He listened to amazing music. Kept hope even through beatings and solitary confinement. Hope led him to spend years tunneling a way out of the prison.

In one scene at the lunch table, he is talking about hope. None of the other prisoners understand. They've all given up hope long ago. They have blank looks on their faces. But he says, “hope is a good thing. Perhaps the best of things.” That was a hope, that transcended the everyday living of a dismal life, and kept him going when nothing else could.

Where do YOU find a hope like that? A hope that keeps you going when nothing else is going your way? A hope that transcends this life, into the next, into eternity?

Only Jesus Christ can offer you a solid hope like that! He offers more than a wish. He offers hope based on the fact that He's defeated death, and He's alive, with us now, and forever more. That hope in Jesus can carry you thru this life and into the next. That hope found in Jesus is for more than this life, more than temporary -- it's lasting. The hope found in Jesus makes a difference in each day you live, keeping you going. Amen.