

**I Peter 3:13-17**  
**May 21, '17**

**“THE HOPE WITHIN”**

**THIS PASSAGE FROM FIRST PETER IS NOT THE ENTIRE LECTIONARY EPISTLE READING FOR TODAY.**

**THE WHOLE THING IS TWICE AS LONG, GOING THROUGH VERSE 22.**

**I HAD A HARD ENOUGH TIME, THOUGH, INCLUDING AS MUCH AS WE DID WITHOUT BEING OVERWHELMED BY IT.**

**PETER MAKES A STATEMENT HERE THAT HAS ALWAYS BEEN ONE OF MY FAVORITE VERSES OF SCRIPTURE.**

**IT’S A SENTENCE RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PASSAGE – *“ALWAYS BE READY TO MAKE YOUR DEFENSE TO ANYONE WHO DEMANDS FROM YOU AN***

***ACCOUNTING FOR THE HOPE THAT IS IN YOU, YET DO IT WITH GENTLENESS & REVERENCE.”***

**THERE ARE TWO VERY IMPORTANT LESSONS AT EITHER END OF THAT SENTENCE WITH SOMETHING PERHAPS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT IN THE MIDDLE OF IT.**

***“ALWAYS BE READY TO MAKE YOUR DEFENSE...”***

**PETER IS TELLING US IT’S IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHAT WE BELIEVE & WHY WE BELIEVE IT.**

**THAT’S NOT EASY, IS IT?**

**WE READ THE BIBLE.**

**WE PRAY.**

**WE COME TO WORSHIP.**

**WE RECITE THE APOSTLES’ CREED & THE LORD’S PRAYER EVERY WEEK.**

**BUT HOW MANY OF US CAN COMFORTABLY  
ANSWER IF ASKED WHAT WE BELIEVE & WHY WE  
BELIEVE IT?**

**EVEN IF YOU CAN INTELLECTUALLY OFFER AN  
ANSWER, HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT IT?**

**HOW DO YOU PUT YOUR FAITH INTO WORDS?**

**PROBABLY THE FIRST THING TO DO IS FORGET  
THE INTELLECTUAL ASPECT OF YOUR ANSWER.**

**THE INTELLECTUAL PART – THE MENTAL PART –  
THE THEOLOGICAL PART – MAY PROVIDE A  
*FOUNDATION* FOR YOUR FAITH, BUT THAT'S NOT  
THE *SUBSTANCE* OF IT.**

**THE HEART OF YOUR FAITH LIES IN YOUR  
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE – IT'S IN THE STORY OF  
YOUR LIFE.**

***“THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO ME TO HAVE JESUS  
CHRIST AT THE CENTER OF MY LIFE.***

***THIS IS WHAT MY EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN.***

***THIS IS THE DIFFERENCE A LIFE OF FAITH MAKES  
FOR ME.”***

**THAT ISN'T EASY TO DO, THOUGH, IS IT?**

**IN A WORLD THAT CONTINUES TO BECOME  
INCREASINGLY SKEPTICAL OF CHRISTIANITY IN  
PARTICULAR & FAITH IN GENERAL, IT BECOMES  
MORE & MORE CHALLENGING TO SPEAK TO  
OTHERS ABOUT WHY YOU CONTINUE TO HOLD  
ONTO THAT WHICH SO MANY HAVE CHOSEN TO  
REJECT & RIDICULE.**

**BUT PERHAPS THE KEY LIES, NOT IN *SPEAKING*,  
BUT RATHER IN *LISTENING*.**

**AND THAT LEADS TO THE LESSON THAT'S FOUND AT THE END OF THAT *SENTENCE* THAT STANDS IN THE *MIDDLE* OF THIS PASSAGE.**

***“ALWAYS BE READY TO MAKE YOUR DEFENSE TO ANYONE WHO DEMANDS FROM YOU AN ACCOUNTING FOR THE HOPE THAT IS IN YOU; YET DO IT WITH GENTLENESS AND REVERENCE...”***

***“DO IT WITH GENTLENESS & REVERENCE.”***

**LAST WEEK, IN OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS, WE WATCHED AN ANIMATED VIDEO WHERE, AT ONE POINT, A YOUNG WOMAN ASKS A GROUP OF PEOPLE – *“ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN?”***

**WHEN THEY RESPOND, *“NO,”* SHE GETS THIS VERY SAD & JUDGMENTAL LOOK ON HER FACE AND SAYS, *“OH, I'M SO SORRY.”***

**THE MESSAGE SHE'S CONVEYING –  
INTENTIONAL OR NOT – IS “*SORRY, BUT SINCE  
YOU'RE A MISERABLE SINNER, YOU'RE GOING TO  
SPEND ETERNITY IN HELL!*”**

**THAT, UNFORTUNATELY, IS HOW MUCH OF THE  
WORLD VIEWS THOSE OF US WHO HAVE  
COMMITTED OUR LIVES TO FOLLOWING JESUS  
CHRIST.**

**WE COME ACROSS AS ARROGANT &  
JUDGMENTAL.**

**WE'VE GOT ALL THE ANSWERS & OUR ANSWERS  
ARE THE RIGHT ONES.**

**THAT'S WHY IT'S FAR MORE IMPORTANT TO  
LISTEN THAN IT IS TO SPEAK IN A CONVERSATION  
ABOUT FAITH.**

**WHEN SOMEONE HAS A QUESTION ABOUT  
SPIRITUAL MATTERS, IT'S NOT REALLY ABOUT  
DOCTRINE OR THEOLOGY.**

**IT'S A QUESTION ABOUT REAL LIFE.**

***“WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?”***

***“HOW CAN I FIND PEACE IN MY LIFE?”***

***“WHO CAN I TRUST TO BE THERE WHEN THINGS  
GO SOUTH?”***

***“WHEN WILL I NOT BE SO AFRAID OF THE  
FUTURE?”***

***“WHERE CAN I TURN WHEN ANGER, DEPRESSION  
& LONELINESS TAKE HOLD OF MY LIFE?”***

**THE KEY IS SIMPLY TO LISTEN.**

**LISTEN WITH LOVE & SENSITIVITY &  
COMPASSION.**

**LISTEN TO THE CARES & CONCERNS THAT ARE  
BROUGHT TO YOU.**

**MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, IF YOU ENGAGE IN A  
30-MINUTE CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE WHERE  
THEIR WORDS OCCUPY 27 OF THOSE 30 MINUTES, AT  
THE END OF IT, THAT PERSON IS GOING TO SAY,  
*“THANKS! I’VE REALLY ENJOYED OUR TIME  
TOGETHER!”***

**CONVERSELY, IF *YOUR* WORDS OCCUPY 27 OF  
THOSE 30 MINUTES, THAT OTHER PERSON WILL BE  
DOING ANYTHING THEY CAN TO GET AWAY FROM  
YOU!**

**THAT’S HUMAN NATURE – IN ANY  
CONVERSATION!**

**IT’S EVEN MORE IMPORTANT IN A  
CONVERSATION ABOUT MATTERS OF FAITH WITH**

**SOMEONE WHO IS SKEPTICAL ABOUT  
CHRISTIANITY.**

**WITH GENTLENESS & REVERENCE, YOU CAN  
SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE OF FINDING ANSWERS TO  
THOSE NAGGING QUESTIONS THAT WE ALL HAVE –  
QUESTIONS ABOUT WHY THINGS HAPPEN, WHERE  
TO FIND PEACE, WHO TO TURN TO IN TROUBLESOME  
TIMES, YOUR FEAR OF THE FUTURE & OVERCOMING  
THE ANGER, DEPRESSION & LONELINESS THAT  
THREATEN TO OVERWHELM & CONSUME YOU.**

**THE WORLD DOESN'T NEED MORE CHRISTIAN  
*LECTURERS.***

**IT NEEDS MORE CHRISTIAN *LISTENERS.***

**SO WE HAVE THOSE TWO LESSONS AT THE TOP  
& BOTTOM OF THIS SINGLE SENTENCE IN THE  
MIDDLE OF THIS PASSAGE.**

***“BE READY TO EXPLAIN YOUR FAITH & DO SO  
WITH GENTLENESS & REVERENCE.”***

**BUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS SENTENCE IN THE  
MIDDLE OF THIS PASSAGE, THERE’S SOMETHING  
ELSE.**

**NOTICE THAT PETER DOESN’T SAY, “*BE READY  
TO MAKE YOUR DEFENSE FOR THE FAITH THAT IS IN  
YOU.*”**

**HE SAYS, “*BE READY TO MAKE YOUR DEFENSE  
FOR THE HOPE THAT IS IN YOU.*”**

**IT SEEMS AS THOUGH THIS IS AN OVERRIDING  
THEME OF THIS ENTIRE LITTLE LETTER.**

**THE PEOPLE TO WHOM HE WAS WRITING WERE  
BEING SLANDERED & THREATENED.**

**THEIR WITNESS TO CHRIST’S LOVE & THEIR  
DETERMINATION TO DEDICATE THEMSELVES TO**

**CHRIST’S SERVICE MADE THEM THE CONSTANT TARGETS OF THOSE WHO SERVED THE ROMAN EMPIRE & HAILED CAESAR AS LORD.**

**DESPITE THEIR INNOCENCE, THEY LIVED IN FEAR OF THE AUTHORITIES WHO CONTROLLED THEIR WORLD.**

**PETER BEGINS HIS LETTER BY SAYING,  
“*BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO ACCORDING TO HIS GREAT MERCY, HAS BROUGHT ABOUT IN US THAT REBIRTH WHICH LEADS TO A LIVING HOPE...*”**

**EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THE DEEPEST DARKNESS IMAGINABLE, PETER TELLS THEM TO HANG ONTO THEIR HOPE.**

**IT’S TRUE IN EVERY AGE, ISN’T IT, OUR OWN INCLUDED.**

**SOMEONE WRITING ON THIS PASSAGE OPENED THEIR REMARKS BY SAYING, “*MANY HAVE DESCRIBED OUR AGE AS AN AGE OF MALAISE, OF QUIET DESPERATION, OF FEAR AND ANXIETY.*”**

***LISTENING TO THE NEWS EACH EVENING, OR READING OUR PAPERS EACH MORNING, WE CAN READILY UNDERSTAND WHY SOME WOULD RESPOND WITH PESSIMISM AND CYNICISM, IF NOT DESPAIR.***

***I FIND IT COMMON TODAY TO HEAR PEOPLE SAY, ‘I JUST CAN’T LOOK AT THE NEWS ANYMORE. I GET SO DEPRESSED. IT’S JUST TOO OVERWHELMING.’”***

**THOSE ARE THE WORDS OF SOMEONE WRITING ON THIS PASSAGE 15 YEARS AGO.**

**IT COULD HAVE BEEN 15 *MINUTES* AGO.**

**BUT IT ALSO COULD HAVE BEEN 150 YEARS AGO OR 1500 YEARS AGO.**

**THESE WORDS OF HOPE ARE FOR EVERY AGE.  
WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT PIE-IN-THE-SKY,  
BLINDLESS OPTIMISM THAT DOESN'T FACE UP TO  
THE REAL PROBLEMS IN OUR WORLD.**

**WE'RE TALKING ABOUT HOPE THAT SEES WITH  
THEY EYES OF FAITH & LOVE.**

**JURGEN MOLTSMANN – ONE OF THE GREATEST  
PROponents OF HOPE AS AN ESSENTIAL OF OUR  
FAITH – SAID THAT WE COME TO KNOW THE TRUTH  
OF HOPE “...IF WE ARE FORCED TO STAND OUR  
GROUND AGAINST DESPAIR. WE COME TO KNOW ITS  
POWER WHEN WE REALIZE THAT IT KEEPS US ALIVE  
IN THE MIDST OF DEATH.”**

**HOPE LOOKS BEYOND THE PRESENT DARKNESS  
INTO SOMETHING THAT LIES IN THE FUTURE –  
HOWEVER DISTANT THAT FUTURE MAY BE.**

**A DAD ARRIVED LATE FOR HIS YOUNG SON'S  
BASEBALL GAME & HE WALKED OVER TO THE  
BENCH TO LET HIM KNOW HE WAS THERE.**

**HE ASKED WHAT THE SCORE WAS & HIS SON  
SAID, "18-0 – WE'RE BEHIND."**

**HIS DAD SAID, "OH, I'M SORRY. I GUESS YOU'RE  
PRETTY DISCOURAGED ABOUT THAT."**

**BUT HIS SON SAID, "OH, NO. WE HAVEN'T EVEN  
GOTTEN UP TO BAT YET!"**

**IN THE PRESENT DARKNESS, WE DON'T KNOW  
WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS & HOPE ENABLES US TO  
LOOK FOR SOMETHING BRIGHTER TO COME.**

**THERE'S A STORY OF A MAN NAMED GEORGE  
WHO EXPERIENCED ONE TRAGEDY AFTER ANOTHER  
EARLY IN HIS LIFE.**

**WHEN HE WAS JUST 6 SIX YEARS OLD, HE HAD TWO BROTHERS WHO DIED AND THEN HIS MOTHER DIED WHEN HE WAS JUST NINE.**

**HE SUFFERED FROM DEPRESSION FOR YEARS, UNDOUBTEDLY RELATED TO THOSE EARLY EXPERIENCES OF MISFORTUNE.**

**AS AN ADULT, THERE WAS YET ANOTHER TRAGEDY THAT NEARLY SENT HIM OVER THE EDGE.**

**HIS YOUNG GRANDDAUGHTER DIED & GEORGE FELL AGAIN INTO DESPAIR.**

**HE WROTE TO A FRIEND, SAYING, “*I SEE NOTHING BUT UNCERTAINTY, CONTENTION, CONFLICT, BELIEFS UNSETTLED AND NOTHING ESTABLISHED IN PLACE OF THEM.*”**

**GEORGE WAS A PAINTER & HIS FATHER HAD BEEN A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT MANUFACTURER.**

**SHORTLY AFTER THE TRAGIC DEATH OF HIS GRANDDAUGHTER, GEORGE WROTE TO A FRIEND, TELLING HER OF A PAINTING HE WAS CONSIDERING.**

**HE SAID, “*HOPE SITTING ON A GLOBE, WITH BANDAGED EYES, PLAYING A LYRE WHICH HAS ALL THE STRINGS BROKEN BUT ONE, OUT OF WHICH SHE IS TRYING TO GET ALL THE MUSIC POSSIBLE, LISTENING WITH ALL HER MIGHT TO THE LITTLE SOUND – DO YOU LIKE THE IDEA?*”**

**YOU HAVE MORE THAN LIKELY SEEN THAT PAINTING.**

**THE PAINTING ITSELF IS QUITE EXTRAORDINARY, BUT IT’S THE TITLE THAT GIVES IT MEANING.**

**IT WOULD SEEM, AS SOME HAVE SUGGESTED,  
THAT IT SHOULD MOST ACCURATELY HAVE BEEN  
TITLED “DESPAIR.”**

**BUT GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS – IN THE  
MIDST OF HIS OWN DESPAIR – DARED TO LOOK  
BEYOND IT TO SOMETHING BRIGHTER.**

**HE TITLED THAT PAINTING “HOPE.”**

**HE LOOKED BEYOND THE PRESENT DARKNESS  
INTO THE FUTURE.**

**HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE WOULD  
HOLD, BUT HE KNEW WHO HELD THAT FUTURE.**

**THERE ARE STORIES GALORE OF WHAT THAT  
PAINTING HAS MEANT TO PEOPLE IN THE 130 YEARS  
SINCE WATTS COMPLETED IT.**

**A HUNDRED YEARS AGO, HENRY SHREWSBURY  
WROTE OF – AS HE SAYS – “*A POOR GIRL,***

***CHARACTER-BROKEN AND HEART-BROKEN,  
WANDERING ABOUT THE STREETS OF LONDON WITH A  
GROWING FEELING THAT NOTHING REMAINED BUT  
TO DESTROY HERSELF.”***

**ACCORDING TO SHREWSBURY, SHE SAW A  
SMALL PRINT OF “HOPE” IN A SHOP AND USED THE  
LAST OF HER MONEY TO BUY IT.**

**HE SAYS, “*LOOKING AT IT EVERY DAY, THE  
MESSAGE SANK INTO HER SOUL, AND SHE FOUGHT  
HER WAY BACK TO A LIFE OF PURITY & HONOR.*”**

**YOU, TOO, MAY FIND THAT YOU CAN RELATE TO  
THAT PAINTING.**

**YOU MAY FEEL AS THOUGH YOU HAVE ONLY  
ONE STRING LEFT ON WHICH TO PLAY THE MUSIC  
OF YOUR LIFE.**

**YOU MAY FEEL THAT ALL THE OTHER STRINGS  
HAVE BROKEN.**

**YOU STILL HAVE MUSIC TO PLAY & YOU STILL  
HAVE A SONG TO SING.**

**HOPE CAN DO THAT FOR US.**

**HOPE CAN ENABLE US TO LOOK BEYOND THE  
PRESENT DARKNESS TO THE FUTURE THAT STANDS  
BEFORE US.**

**ALL THE STRINGS OF YOUR LIFE BUT ONE MAY  
BE BROKEN.**

**YOUR LIFE IS FRAGILE & THINGS YOU ONCE  
WERE ABLE TO DO ARE NOW IN THE DISTANT PAST.**

**BUT IT'S WITH THAT REMAINING STRING THAT  
YOU CAST YOUR LOT.**

**THAT ONE, SINGLE REMAINING STRING  
ENABLES YOU TO LIVE IN THE HOPE OF A BETTER  
TOMORROW.**

**NO, WE DON'T KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE  
HOLDS.**

**NONE OF US DO.**

**AND YET WE CONTINUE TO LIVE WITH HOPE  
BECAUSE EVEN THOUGH WE DON'T KNOW WHAT  
THE FUTURE HOLDS, OUR FAITH ASSURES US THAT  
WE DO KNOW WHO HOLDS IT. AMEN.**

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport  
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