

God of Hope – Marlee Tierce August 16, 2020

When Pastor Keith called and asked me to talk with you today, I asked him what I should say, and he said to listen to God and say what He tells me. And the words flowed. I don't think I get enough credit for the fact that I do all of this unmedicated! It is not easy to stand in front of you, my church family, and pour out my heart to a computer screen. Know that I miss all of you very much!

An entry written by Sheila Walsh from Laughter for a Woman's Soul reads,

Hope is a precious gift of our salvation. While we can “hope” that our kids don't spill their milk, we must remember that our only reliable hope is in what we cannot see or control: the outrageous faithfulness of God. ...Hope is acting on the conviction that despite what we see with the natural eye, God is working in the spiritual realm to accomplish His perfect will in our lives.

God's Word declares hope. God's promises proclaim hope. We must think hope. Speak hope. Pray hope. Sing hope. Act hope. Share hope. In other words, get our hopes up. Because hope has been given to us, we can expect the best, even in the worst conditions. Praise God!

John Wesley would open up all small group meetings with the question, “How is it with your soul?” That is a far deeper question than, “How are you?” How is your soul doing? How is your spirit faring? Really, how are you? On a scale of 1-10 today I am at 7.

So, why am I at a 7? Romans 12:12 *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*

- What are things that I'm engaged in that are draining the life out of my soul? I must not dwell in fear or anger or disbelief, but I am surrounded by media and bias that promote these things. I find myself frustrated at people who don't understand or choose to antagonize others and prey on the fear. And I am NOT feeling patient in this affliction! I want to get out and play. I want to be with friends not worrying about where they have been or who they have been around. Are they carrying the virus? When I'm wearing a mask, I feel like I should explain who I am—like my friends won't know me otherwise and I'm always surprised when they do!
- What am I doing that is bringing my soul closer to God? I must pray and read God's word and care for others. I think I am praying more. The daily prayer card is filled. I do think I am more faithful in prayer right now. I need to spend more time reading God's word.
- What are the things that I am doing that really make my soul shine brightly and flourish? I am living in Hope. I am praying with Hope. I am staying away from people who drain me of my Hope. I am trying to take care of myself. I am keeping my mind learning and thinking. I am seeing the small miracles of God's work every day. I am surrounded by

the angels who help me locate lost things and remind me of forgotten thoughts. I hope people can see my joy in my smiles even around the mask.

Those who know me know that I am a science geek and that I love to read. I am currently reading The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History by John M. Barry. This book was written in 2004 (way before there was a COVID 19) to explain

- the pestilence—illnesses and deaths, and the explosion of the “Spanish Flu.”
- the warriors—scientists in laboratories, doctors, nurses, health officials,
- the media—propaganda and lies in the press to cover up the truth during wartime and sometimes politics fed lies to keep people’s spirits up,
- the economics—people having to go to work to make a living with people dying next to them sometimes within a day of getting sick, so businesses closed, people didn’t have work or a way to get their daily needs met,
- the society—people whose lives were changed as they were forced to live in the fear of the unknown; the resulting deaths and debilitating diseases—so many that the sick were piled together and they ran out of room for the dead. People rebelled about having to wear masks and stay apart,
- the politics of the time—the entry of the United States into World War 1 with the draft of young soldiers into overcrowded military containments. The government wanted all available money to go into Liberty bonds and expenses of war.
- And the church! They were closed without the technology to meet together virtually. Ministers sent sermons to the newspapers and made flyers they delivered to homes. Rev. Parrish, pastor of Eleventh Ave. Methodist church on Birmingham, Alabama wrote: *“Meditation is very profitable to the soul, but the rush of the world is so great at present that men think they have not time to walk out in the fields for contemplation or to sit quietly by the fireside and muse.*

However, we have a God given opportunity for this helpful indulgence by reason of this unique Sabbath which has dawned upon us. Out of necessity our churches are closed, and all public gatherings must be discontinued. We cannot go motoring and we would not go to business if we could, and even the fields are dangerous lest we should come in contact with goldenrod and ragweed and take influenza. But we can sit by the fire and give ourselves to thought and reflection which will bring great profit to us.”

The book exclaims that the disease, the Spanish flu, killed between 50 and 100 million people world-wide in 24 weeks (6 months). The actual pandemic lasted over a year.

Let’s put this in perspective: As of this past week of the COVID 19 virus, there were over 20 million cases and over 750,000 people world-wide have died since November 17, 2019 about 36 weeks (9 months).

The parallels are uncanny—the economics, political shadows, the media, the fear of the unknown, the people’s obstinacy against the rules. The roles of the health departments and sacrifices of the medical community. The drive of the scientists in the laboratory to find a way to boost immunity with sera, vaccines, known cures of diseases of the times. They used medicines that successfully fought diphtheria, whooping cough, cholera, typhoid, bacterial pneumonia, etc. to no avail because they were fighting a virus like it was bacteria because it was all they knew over a hundred years ago.

Today with our newer technology scientists know the difference between bacteria and virus, but this COVID 19 is a new strain, a new battle and the causes/effects are still in discovery.

Mistakes were made and will be made until more is learned over time. And not knowing feeds the darkness. Putting light on the scientific truth will help us overcome the unknowns. Don’t believe everything you read. There are shadows there. If you want to know, get the answers from the science not the social media.

A bit of history: The Spanish flu’s beginnings were traced to a small farm in Haskell, Kansas where a virus from a farm animal mutated to infect a human. If it began in Kansas, why was it called the Spanish flu? Because of World War I, Spain was the only country whose media was lax enough to allow the real stories of what was happening in the country. The other countries in the throes of war kept their press and media deep in the secrets and propaganda that surrounded them. They couldn’t tell countries they were battling that millions of their soldiers were dying every day or that the economics were in bad shape.

Spain’s newspapers wrote about the disease and its effects on their people while the other countries hid the weakened state of their people due to the disease. The world knew and read about the influenza from the Spanish media.

And the rest is history! The virulence of the Spanish flu lasted over a year. And the virulence of COVID 19 will become history, but it will take time.

And we are blessed with time. Have you thanked the Lord for the time to be together this morning? Blessing your meals counts before, during, or even after. We need to thank the Lord that we can meet together today and have the devices and skills to stay together even when we are apart. We can thank the Lord before, during, or after.

It is difficult in these unusual circumstances to find our blessings. But we are a people of Hope. As Desmond Tutu said, “Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.” It does feel dark when we are separated from sitting together in the sanctuary singing together, greeting each other in the gathering area or sharing meals in the Fellowship Hall. The Lord doesn’t have to have a building to do His work or to show us His light. How many times have we heard that? I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together.

No matter where we are. No matter what we are doing. We are the church. And we are blessed to be with others who love the Lord, who praise Jesus, and who care about others. We just have to take it upon ourselves to shine our lights in different ways right now.

We are Hope. Please don't fall into the darkness of the media propaganda. Please don't dwell in what isn't right now. I lift praises that we can meet on Facebook to do this each Sunday morning. Safely distance from those things that cause you frustration and anger. At times like these, I'm grateful that thoughts don't appear in bubbles over my head!

In truth: God loves us. He is our light and our Hope. We are His church not a building to attend. Walk away from the crowd. Stay safely distanced. Do you ever what to just plop an "out of order" sticker on your forehead and call it a day?

Take time to read your Bible. Hum hymns during your work. Be kind to someone **whether they deserved it or not**. Find Jesus in your heart. Feel the warmth and comfort of the Lord. He is there. He is knocking. But you must open the door. Talk to Him. Cry out to Him. Be still and listen to Him. And have hope.

He did not promise us sunshine and roses—He promised us that He would be with us. Matthew 28:20 *"Lo I am with you always even to the ends of the Earth."*

It is Hope He has given us. No matter what, He will listen. He will comfort. He will share with us His Kingdom. But we don't want to die to live in Heaven. So, we have Hope here on Earth.

Let me share a family story. My Dad was born in August of 1917. He caught the Spanish flu when he was just a baby. My aunts, his older sisters, told us of the work of my grandmother to keep him alive staying awake days and nights to keep him breathing using whatever she could. And he lived. And that is history. You know that I am editor for our annual Advent booklet. I would love it if you would write me stories of our history now! What an Advent booklet that will be! Filled with stories of Hope. Yes. We wait on Christmas, but this year we are waiting on so much more! I would love to read about your Hope as you wait for the time when this pandemic will become history. Tell me how you live everyday showing your hope and God's blessings as we wait. I need your words, your stories. I need your light! mtierce@aol.com. Sue or Reba can give you my contact information.

What is our most important history. Jesus lived. *"I serve a risen Savior! He's in the world today. I know that he is with me, no matter what men say."*

Imagine that time over 2 centuries ago. The disciples weren't expecting Jesus to be crucified! "That shouldn't have happened" might have been part of their bewildering conversations. Jesus did die. He told them it would happen, but they didn't believe or understand until it happened. The facts of Jesus' presence among them had been replaced by the fears for their own lives. They were sheltering in place, not knowing what might come next. The Bible is filled with these stories of history. Of people in fear of the unknown. "Fear not" is explained over 500 times in Bible verses depending on the translation. And yet, we fear. We worry.

We are living this history of the COVID-19 virus. It wasn't expected. The illnesses, hospitalizations and deaths shouldn't be happening. Grief, frustration, and fear are present, sometimes hitting too close to home.

And remember that **when the disciples went to the empty tomb that Sunday morning where Jesus had risen; That wasn't expected either.** Fear not. "Lo, I am with you always even to the ends of the Earth."

Some days you will have to pray hard and dig deep to find that Hope, but we are the church. We are a children of God who loves us. What more can we Hope for?

It is well with my soul. As John Wesley would ask, "How is it with your soul?" Give it some thought as you step closer to God's word and His bidding this week. Listen to that small inner voice and Have Hope, Share Hope, Be Hope this week ahead. Our world needs us right now to show others our hope.