

Romans 8:22-27

## Hope in Our Present and Future Time

### *Finding hope through the Holy Spirit*

Shave and a haircut (Sung). How many of you need to hear the ending of that little phrase or have already sung it in your heads? There was a fun movie a number of years ago called *Who framed Roger Rabbit*. It was a movie that combined cartoon characters with live characters. It is explained that toons cannot resist the urge to end Shave and a haircut. With the expected ending. Not finishing the line is almost enough to make the toons explode. In fact, in one scene the human villain is able to find Roger Rabbit because he goes along the room knocking on the wall singing "Shave and a hair cut." And Roger comes bursting through a wall singing the much-needed ending.

Music has a way of showing us about the now and not yet of the kingdom of God. We live in this present age, just as each generation has lived in their present age, but as Christians we look to a future that is God's. Where either God has finally ended our waiting by becoming fully present in our world, or fully present to us in our dying. I do not do a funeral or celebration of life where people trust and hope that their loved one is now fully embraced in the loving arms of God.

Let me demonstrate further using the music to illustrate. In our hymn book there are songs that end on a minor key. So they sound like this. (Use 340 – At the name of Jesus). It is a minor key, it feels sad, but minor can feel angry or frustrated or at times peaceful. But staying there makes many people feel like they need a lift. Often you will hear musicians change the last chord in the last verse of a hymn so that it sounds lighter, or happier some might say.

We also have music that just doesn't seem to end. It feels like it is still up in the air. (Use 758 – Christ's is the world). The listener would be so much happier, their bodies more at rest if they just hear the coming home notes.

Then there are songs like our Sung prayer for illumination today that just could keep going around and round.

Music that acts in this way, either ending on a minor chord, or sounding incomplete, or even not seeming to have a proper ending can leave us unsettled. But this demonstrates much of our lives. We live in unsettled times, as has every generation. When we hear of school or mass shootings, continued and escalated violence in the Gaza strip, devastating floods and fire, volcanos spewing lava and ash, wars that never seem to end, refugees looking for a place to call home, and our continued conversations with our indigenous brothers and sisters that bring up the past with

challenges for our future, it feels at times that there is no reason to hope. We live thinking “Will this ever end?” We desire that the earth and its people would just settle down.

But this isn't the way of the world, never has been. We live in a world that experiences much brokenness. The scripture says, “<sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; <sup>23</sup>and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.” (Romans 8:22-23 NRSV).

The Book of Romans, was a letter written by the Apostle Paul to a community of faith trying to understand the Good News that was Jesus Christ. This letter was written to people living in what at the time was understood as the center of the world as they knew it, to people who were always under threat of persecution for their beliefs and practices. It was written to a people who knew first hand how dangerous the world was. And the Gospel has always given hope to those in deepest need.

It is really difficult to know hope in that way in our culture where our government though not perfect is not trying to oppress us. Where war is not a part of our everyday experience. And though we have seen an upsurge in violence most of us feel pretty safe.

But hope lives where there is struggle. The two cannot be separated. When you or someone close to you get a diagnosis of cancer despair is paired with hope. When the body is declining and frustration is experienced, that is paired with hope for what can be done. When a marriage is broken or relationship lost and healing has begun, there is hope for what life may yet bring.

When a child is sick or disabled there is hope for each day and the progress that can be made so that life is joy-filled. When death comes we hope in life after death. Life with Jesus and being held in the arms of the God of love. When speaking about hope Paul wrote, <sup>24</sup>For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:24-24 NRSV).

Hear this again, “<sup>24</sup>For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

Hope is not something we can touch, smell, taste, hear, or see, it just is, but it comes out of what we do not yet know. And though the scripture says we wait for it with patience, in my experience we don't do any waiting with much patience. It is something that one can achieve with practice but waiting with patience does not come naturally. Just talk to any child waiting for their caregiver to pay attention or stop talking so that they can get moving. The favorite question in the vehicle, “How long?”

And our response is not always a patience one. We respond with “just wait” or “in a minute”. Not really a helpful response but one that is used often. And if anything has changed over the centuries since the writing of Romans it is that we are even more impatient. Just think of how frustrated we can get when we send a text and don’t immediately get a response. Or send an email only to find out that it arrived days later, or the phone line is busy and we can’t get through, worse yet, getting stuck in the endless cycle of pressing buttons when we get an automated answering service.

But it is even more difficult to be patience when one is awaiting treatments or waiting to hear the results of tests. We feel like we are in the throws of Shave and a haircut. If we are a parent, partner, or child of one who is cruel either emotionally, physically, or both, we wonder how to be patient, we live more in fear. When we bury a loved one, hope is hard to come by. When you lose a job, or your mind, hope can be the only way through.

Those who commit suicide for whatever unexplainable reason have lost hope. That is what drives someone to that place. As much as those around them see nothing but possibilities for life, the person who chooses to end their life see no hope. In training to help those who might be considering suicide one tries to help them see what they have to live for.

But isn’t that true for all of us? We need to know what we have to live for. Usually we know we have much to live for, but at times it like the word of the Apostle to the Corinthians re all we have to cling to, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor. 13:13).

Even though Paul says the greatest of these is love, and I believe it, we need to love to want to live. The others, faith and hope are not to be discounted. All three of these things faith, hope, and love, give life, and life abundant even in the midst of struggle, in fact these three are most apparent in struggle. But this is also where peace can be found. When Jesus shared a sign of peace with his disciples, when he spoke of peace, it came from a place of faith, hope, and love.

Again our scripture reads, <sup>26</sup>Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup>And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” (Romans 8:26-27NRSV).

So though we live in a world of now and not yet, we can be at home here, knowing that hope, peace, grace, faith, and love are ours in Christ Jesus because this is the will of God. And we can look to being completely at home with God in another time, whether God comes to us first or we become one with God in our death.

In time we will end the tune, “shave and a hair cut” with “two bits!” Our minor songs will become major, our endless and incomplete melodies complete.

The Holy Spirit's power is as great on this day in the church as it always has been. The Spirit is still praying for us and with us. The world's groaning, our groaning will end, and we will be with God fully and completely. In the meantime, we live in hope.

May the peace of Christ be with you. Amen.