

“When Do You Give Up?”  
Jeremiah 8:18-22; 16:14-16  
1 Timothy 2:1-7  
Rev. David Hutchinson  
Sunday, September 22, 2019

I’ve got a friend who believes that there’s no such thing as a hopeless situation.

I’ve argued with my friend about this...

Surely there are SOME situations that are hopeless.

What about standing on the deck of the Titanic after it hits the iceberg?

“That’s a good example of a hopeless situation,” I said.

He said: What about Rose Dawson?

Remember her story of survival - - from the movie?

It’s the ultimate story of HOPE!

Well, ok - - what about a Nazi Concentration camp?

He said: What about Eli Wiesel the famous Jewish writer who survived.

I said: What about a World War?

He said: What about Private Ryan?

Full body paralysis?

Christopher Reeves?

What about death?

What about Lazarus?

Then I said: What about arguing against you?

And he looked at me and said: you.

Hope is not about the situation.

Hope is about the PERSON - - in the situation.

Which brings up the Priscilla Circle - - here at Plymouth.

We just heard on Wednesday about the work of the Makindu Children's Center they support. / This group of Presbyterian women from Plymouth Church who meet year after year, and among other things they support this organization in Kenya. / Last year they decided to revamp their schedule in order to keep meeting. Things had changed for a few of them - - so maybe they should end the group - - they thought. They could have just stopped meeting - - but instead they CHANGED how they meet. / They did not give up hope for their work of helping others.

And - - the work of Makindu - - is one thing that they still support because of that decision. / Children who would have a much less hope-ful situation - - without the work of the children's center, which helps provide food, medical care, education, support to hundreds of children. Winnie Barron the former director and now board member is a beacon of hope. / Because HOPE is more about the PEOPLE - - than the SITUATION.

Supposedly there was a similar group of church women - - who were SO close that as they neared the end of their lives - - they all died on the same day.

St. Peter was busy when they all arrived at the gates of heaven at the same time.

So they asked if they could visit the OTHER place while they waited.

After a few days Satan called St. Peter - - obviously upset.

“Hey you have got to get this church group out of here soon!

One more bake sale and they'll have raised enough money

to buy an air conditioner!”

So - - what really is a hopeless situation?

Or is it MORE about - - the PEOPLE in that situation?

Hope is not about the situation.

Hope is about the people IN the situation.

In this morning's Old Testament reading from Jeremiah - - the prophet is facing what seems like a hopeless situation. / Jeremiah says, "My grief is BEYOND healing"

"The HARVEST time is past - - summer is ENDED - - and we are NOT saved."

It's one thing to worry about HOW the harvest will BE...

It's another thing to know it is PAST - - and it was not good.

And for Jeremiah - - there's more to worry about than crops.

He used this image to talk about the invasion of Babylon.

The nation of Israel was in trouble.

People were being deported.

Things were BAD.

As we read the prophecies - - there's something to know about harvests in Israel:

In ancient Israel there were TWO harvest times:

The early harvest of GRAIN...

And the LATE harvest of fruit.

If BOTH harvests failed - - famine was pretty much guaranteed.

So Jeremiah is painting a picture of a situation - - many people would have seen as a hopeless situation. / BUT - - into that SITUATION - - comes a PERSON - - named Jeremiah - - who will not give up.

Sure he LAMENTS.

Jeremiah says, "My heart is sick within me"

But his lament is the lament of a person - - who will not give up hope.

In chapter 16 - - after this lament - - Jeremiah holds out hope.

He remembers all the way back to Egypt.

And he says that just like God freed the people from slavery in Moses day...

They will be set free AGAIN - - from Babylon.

“They days ARE coming” - - says Jeremiah.

Have hope. / Do not give up.

Timothy’s letter in the New Testament - - is another example of not giving up.

Timothy urges us to pray for all people.

Pray for kings - - and people in positions of national leadership.

Pray for - - even senators!

No situation - - is hopeless!

It is not about the situation.

It is about the PEOPLE - - in the situation.

And the answer to the question: when do you give up?

That’s up to you.

It’s NOT up to the situation.

“Pray” urges Timothy.

Pray for godly peaceable lives.

Prayer doesn’t mean the past goes away.

Prayer for someone - - doesn’t mean that there are no consequences.

There ARE consequences - - for our actions.

AND - - keep praying.

That’s what Timothy says.

Paul is said to have written this letter to Timothy.

Paul is the ultimate missionary.

Paul encounters ALL KINDS of challenges and problems.

Thrown into prison - - shipwrecked...

But in these SITUATIONS - - that many people would have called hopeless...

Paul - - has hope.

He does not give up.

All of which brings me to another example of hope.

Another intrepid disciple - - who lived in Alaska - - and did not give up.

Nancy and I went to Alaska in June.

It is a rugged and beautiful place.

We saw the glaciers - - and we tried to have hope about the future.

This is the land of one of the most persistent Presbyterians: Sheldon Jackson.

The novelist James Michener wrote about Sheldon Jackson plowing his way through a blizzard - - in 1885 - - on foot. / He was on his way to a town in Montana named "Deadhorse" - - where he was going to start a church.

Talk about not giving up hope.

Jackson was 43 years old and 5 feet tall.

He plowed through the snow to this town of 381 people - - total population.

As he topped yet another snowy hill without seeing the town he is reported to have said: "Well, God, you must be hiding the town on the other side of the next hill"!

One of his most notable accomplishments was getting reindeer to Alaska.

The reason this was important was to support indigenous Eskimos.

The trading industry developed by white men was not always good nor fair to the Eskimos - - and sometimes made life in native villages worse - - with the influence of the whiskey trade - - and the dwindling wildlife.

Sheldon Jackson teamed up with a courageous sea captain named Michael Healy - - who was also appalled at what was happening to the Eskimos.

These two men fought off starvation - - bringing reindeer across from Siberia in Russia on Healy's ship. / Determined not give up hope - - they were.

A loud boisterous sea captain and a short stubborn Presbyterian.

They changed the situation.

Michener reports this conversation supposedly between them:

"I'm not perfect" Healy said, "AND - - If YOU were perfect - - you wouldn't have so many good people - - mad at you".

Jackson replied:

"I was put on earth to do God's will - - and I will do it my way."

Healy responded:

"I was put on earth by - - who knows - - to sail a ship - -

And I will do THAT - - MY way."

So these two imperfect men - - sailed to Alaska.

And it didn't matter to them - - what the situation was.

They were in it - - and they did not give up - - hope.

So as we look ahead at Plymouth Church - - how can we be inspired by this?

We have a new mission and service project for Habitat for Humanity.

We have numerous other projects like Makindu school.

There are a LOT of places in the world - - that need HOPE.

There are a lot of situations.

The question is - - what kind of PEOPLE - - are we going to be?

If we focus on the situation - - we might loose hope.

BUT - - if we focus on what kind of people we are going to be - - no matter what the situation - - we might FIND more hope that we think.

My hope for you - - is that you find a friend who doesn't believe in a hopeless situation. / And I guarantee - - you have one - - if you look.

Remember I said at the beginning of this - - that I have a friend who does not believe in a hopeless situation? / Well I'm pretty sure - - Jesus qualifies - - as that person. / Was the cross - - a hopeless situation? / Now - - it's a symbol OF hope.

Imagine Jesus looking at you and at me...

What would Jesus say - - to us?

“You are not hopeless”

“There is no such thing as a hopeless situation”

Only a hopeless - - person.

But with Jesus - - we all - - DO have hope - - no matter what.

May it be so - - for you and for me.

Amen.