

“We were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what has already been seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience”.

So, whenever there is a discussion of hope, a pastor friend of mine used to always tell this story about this little girl who wanted a pony. And every time she had a chance, she would tell her parents that she wanted a pony. When she was asked what she wanted for Christmas, she would say, “A pony.” And what do you want for your birthday? “A pony.” That was the only thing that she wanted, was a pony.

Well, on her eighth birthday, she woke up and she looked out and she saw a pile of stuff. And you all know what stuff we’re talking about. And she was so excited. She said, “You got me a pony.” And the parents said, “Well, how’d you know?” “Well, because I saw this stuff.” Sometimes hope is found within the stuff.

To put it another way, a writer, Holly Holt-Wohl, wrote a book about her experience with her differently abled child. And she talks about how often she refers to the Romans text we just heard, especially verse 18. “Considering that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.” And she says, she often says, “This had better be some glory.”

As I was sitting on my sister’s sofa the other night, having begun to work on this sermon, when I heard the president’s speech about election fraud, I have to tell you for a moment, Romans 18, verse 18 played in my head. “The suffering of the present time are not worth comparing with glory about to be revealed to us.” And because I giggled because I heard Holly’s line in my head, “That had better be some glory.”

I think we live in a time where hope is hard and challenging to hold onto. We remember what our world used to be, and we wondered, can hope truly be found? Maybe in our own lives, we’re going through some rough patches of life, and we wonder where hope can be found. Maybe ourselves or someone we love has just received challenging news, health, job, kids, and the list goes on. And we wonder, where can hope be found?

And I’m wondering even if KLC is finding it hard to hold on to hope that someday you will have a congregationally called pastor again. I wonder if when you think about whether you realize it or not, you enter into grief and hope begins to seem elusive. You’ve hoped before, but never maybe saw the glory. And you are waiting for that glory. And maybe you’re even saying with Holly, “This had better be some glory.”

In the midst of the suffering, in the midst of the grief, Paul invites us to hold on to a hope, a hope that is stubborn and that doesn’t let go. Paul invites us to know that hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. It’s like a muscle that keeps reaching and strengthening, sort of like our lungs that keep working even though we don’t think about it.

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This hope is not a superficial hope. It's not like "I hope it won't rain today because I want to go to the beach." The hope that Paul is talking about in this Roman text is found and rooted in Christ's completed work. This hope that Paul is talking about is tied with resurrection. It is bound together with the life of the risen Christ.

God put his power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead. Paul makes it very clear that in turn, Christ is putting his power to work in us, and not just for someday, but for now. That this hope is active and alive and present in our lives.

Paul reminds us, even though we live in the spirit-granted hope, life isn't going to be perfect. And all of us sitting here know that truth, that suffering is part of the fallen world in which we live. We live in this tension as Christians as already and not yet.

Paul reminds us that hope looks forward, looks forward to our own resurrection, and that hope is always looking into the future, understanding that the past and the suffering has happened. And yes, we might even have scars from the past, and we live in the present, but our hope, our eternal hope, is founded in the future.

And Paul reminds us that we can't do this work of hope on our own. Christ has sent us the Holy Spirit, our comforter, our paraclete, who sustains us and helps us to see hope, even when grief is so strong that we can hardly see a glimmer of life. Remember, Paul tells us in the text, that even when our grief, our suffering is so heavy that we can't even pray, the Holy Spirit will intercede for us.

And of course, our hope rests on God's faithfulness. In Romans 8, it concludes with the assurance that nothing, that nothing will separate us from God's love. Neither death, nor life, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Hope depends upon God's faithfulness, not upon our strength or our ability. someone asked me once how i get through challenging time and my answer was i know i serve a faithful god i know there is a holy spirit with power that we can never understand but uses that power for good and i know just as we sang that Jesus loves me and the whole world and in that knowledge I can hope.

I can hope, even though it's not comforting all the time or comfortable. Hope asks us to open ourselves to what we do not know, to pray for illumination in this life, to imagine what is beyond whatever we could even in our wildest imagination dream, and maybe even to bear what seems unbearable. It calls us to keep breathing even when the grief is so heavy we feel like we can't take another breath. It reminds us that our hope is in our Lord and Savior who gives us victory.

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I want to close with a poem from Jan Richardson from *The Cure for Sorrow*, and it's called *The Blessing of Hope*.

“May we know the hope that is not just for someday, but it is for this day, here and now, in this moment that opens to us, Hope not made of wishes, but made of substance. Hope made of sinew and muscle and bone. Hope that has breath and a beating heart. Hope that will not keep quiet and polite. Hope that knows how to holler when it is called for. Hope that knows how to sing where there seems little cause. Hope that can raise us from the dead, not someday, but this day, every day, again and again and again”.