North Shore Congregational Church
FOX POINT, WI

From the Pulpit…

"Pass it On: Christ-Colored Glasses"

Rev. Dr. Martin Hall – Preaching

2 Corinthians 5: 11-21

March 31, 2019

"Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (Isaiah 40:31)

"'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" (Jeremiah 29:11)

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

"The Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love." (Psalm 147:11)

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who live him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

I could stand up here all day and do nothing but that. I could spend 15 minutes reading the passages that speak of the hope we know in God. I could spend the whole time sharing the stories of Jesus' ministry and miracles. I could devote the entire sermon to just dwelling in the hope that erupts from the Beatitudes… "Blessed are the poor in spirit…Blessed are those who mourn…Blessed are the meek…Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." In so many ways, the Bible in its entirety is a treatise on the hope that is ours in God, and I'm the first to admit that this passage from 2 Corinthians is not necessarily one of the first to come to mind when we think of hope! But, I'm just not sure there is anything more hopeful than the 16th and 17th verses of 2 Corinthians 2. "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" I'm not sure the hope of that phrase can over-emphasized. And it all, for me, lies in the power of perspective.

I think we often don't realize how much the choice of our perspective influences our experience of the world around us. The choice to focus on what we can learn from another in lieu of the choice of trying to teach…The choice to center our awareness on what is there, instead of what

isn't…The choice to be driven by what could be and not what is…the list goes on and on and on. Moment after moment in our lives our experience with the world around us, and perhaps more to the point the manner in which we engage that world, is shaped by the perspective we have either wittingly or unwittingly chosen to hold. The magnificence that stems from that reality, however, comes when we consider the perspective that Jesus brought to this world.

Our "Pass it On" series is based on the fundamental argument that Jesus was a reflection of God and that we are to be a reflection of Jesus. In this particular context of perspective, then, it's not hard to start seeing the manner in which Jesus simply viewed the world in a different way.

- When the people saw tax collectors who should be despised and sinners that should be condemned, Jesus saw people with broken lives who needed to know of God's mercy and grace.
- When the faithful saw the dirty and diseased who could contaminate their rightful living, Jesus saw those in darkness who longed for the light of God's love.
- When the religiously righteous saw a woman caught in adultery who deserved to be stoned, Jesus saw a child of God who needed forgiveness.
- When the Disciples saw children bothering and bugging their teacher and friend, Jesus saw those who would most warmly receive his ministry and message.

When the world saw those who were not worth their time, grace, forgiveness, help, attention and love, Jesus saw beyond what was and looked to what could be. And that, my friends, is the root of our hope. "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" You see, what I'm pointing towards is that the very foundation of our hope, the very glory in which we rest, is that the eyes through which Jesus saw this world (the eyes that are a reflection of God's view of this world) never saw the simplicity of what was, but the glory of what could be. What greater hope is there, than that?

When we had our conversation about hope (and hopelessness) in Bible study on Monday night, there were a number of words used to reflect both of those realities. So many of them, however, pointed to the underlying notion that hope stems from a confidence, a trust, an assurance, that whatever is now is not the end of the story. Hope is knowing that our strife, our struggle, our pain, our worry, our fear is not where our story ends. Hope is knowing that what is now is not what needs to be, and that is the perspective with which Jesus saw this world. He saw the hope of the new creation. He saw the promise of what could be. He looked beyond the pain, disfunction, and disease of the moment and saw what could be through the mercy, grace and love of God. What greater hope is there, than that? What greater hope is there, than knowing that we are never at the end of the story but that, in Christ, there is a new creation…that the old can be gone and the new can come. That's the promise in which we live. And, that's the perspective with which Jesus engaged this world.

When you look through the stories of Jesus – when you consider the various tales of his ministry – you see a constant reflection of the power of his perspective. He saw the world through the eyes of what could be through the mercy, grace and love of God. He was never limited by what was. He was never curtailed by the judgments of this world. He was relentlessly driven by a focus on what could be in God, and not what was in humanity. That perspective is what breathed

hope into the world. And that, my friends, is why I chose this passage for our Pass it On reflections on hope.

"Seeing with the eyes of Christ" is the way Pope Benedict put it. I'm referring to it a bit more jovially as looking upon the world with Christ-colored glasses, but the point brings us right back to the power of perspective.

Go back to where I started. Moment after moment in our lives our experience with the world around us, and perhaps more to the point the manner in which we engage that world, is shaped by the perspective we have either wittingly or unwittingly chosen to hold. So, imagine the impact of putting on those Christ-colored glasses!

- Going back to our sermon from last week…consider your natural perspective on that person who so deeply wronged you some years ago. Consider how hard it is to forgive. Imagine how you'd look at it differently through the eyes of Christ.
- Think how you were influenced or impacted as you listened to Tom speak about Pilgrim's Presence this morning. Try to consider how it might have been different had you heard it through the ears of Christ.
- Imagine the beggar on the corner, the drug addict that crosses our paths, the warring we see on television, the devastation of natural disasters, I could go on and on…but just ask yourself how your engagement with the world around us would be different if you were viewing it through those Christ-colored glasses.

That, I suggest, is how we pass on the hope of Christ. We can tell people about the love of God and hope they hear it. We can proclaim the good news and pray that people receive it. We can share that we know that our pain is not the end of the story because of the promises we know in God, and we can invite people into the same confidence. But, people were drawn to Jesus because he didn't simply tell them about the hope of God – he chose to see them through lens of that reality.

- People were drawn to Jesus because he saw them through the lens of God's love instead of that of the world's judgment.
- People were drawn to Jesus because he chose to see what could be and not just what was.
- People were drawn to Jesus because he saw them through the eyes of God, and in the power of that perspective they were able to find the hope of a new creation.

This world is broken, and that brokenness surrounds us (and sometimes engulfs us!) every day. Amidst that brokenness, however, we know the hope of God that this is not the end of the story. Amidst that brokenness we know that God is at work, that the love of Christ is alive, and that the promise of new creations are forever girding us in the face of our despair. We know that, and the world around us can know that too! We know it, however, not just because Jesus preached, but because the world experienced, in him, what it meant to be seen in light of what could be and not what was. Imagine how different our engagement with the world would become, and what hope this world would know in us, if the same were true for you, and for me!