

“Living in Hope”
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Romans 5:1-5; John 1:1-5

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Last week we recognized our most recent graduates during worship. This past Tuesday the Head Start program here graduated their 4- and 5- year-olds. I’m sure all of them, both older and younger, are glad to be done with school and tests for a while.

I know we’ve all taken tests at one time or another. Right? We’ve all taken tests. When you took those tests, were you hopeful you would pass? Maybe a better question would be, did you study? Did you study for your tests?

When I was 25, I moved to NC to go to school. Of course, I wanted to pay in-state tuition because that was cheaper. So, I did what everyone did. I went down to the DMV and took the written test for a NC driver’s license, the first step in getting in-state tuition.

Did I study for that test? No. Of course not. I’d had a driver’s license since I was 16. I was a safe driver. I was very hopeful I would pass.

Did I pass that test? No. Of course not. I flunked it big time. All those rules and distances and how far behind you have to follow someone. Big fat F. I went home with my tail between my legs and studied. I studied hard. The next time, I passed.

Being hopeful you’ll pass a test without studying is a bit like being hopeful you’ll win the lottery without buying a ticket. Hope all you want but probably not going to happen.

A characteristic of Christians is we are hopeful people. We live in hope. We live surrounded by hope. We don’t look to the future with despair or melancholy. As Christians, we look to the future with joy. As Christians, we look to the future with hope. As Christians, we look to the future with hope.

But our hope is not baseless. We’re not the student who tried sleeping with a book under their pillow before the big test.

No. As Christians, we have a basis for our hope. Our hope is rooted and grounded in two very important truths.

The first truth begins before the beginning. Our OT lesson tells us God's Wisdom, the Holy Spirit, was there before the beginning. Before the foundations of the earth were laid, before the stars were put in the sky, God's Wisdom was there. The Holy Spirit, the Wisdom of God, the God who is as close as our breath, was there before time itself.

Jesus also was there from the beginning. We read that in the first few verses of John's Gospel. The instrument of our salvation has always existed.

There was never a time when our triune God did not exist in loving unity. This is good news! It means God was planning our salvation before we were created. God didn't look up one day and say, "Goodness. Those human beings have really made a hash of things. I had better create a savior." God didn't look up and say, "Wow. Those human beings still need me. I had better create a Spirit to be with them in their daily lives."

No. Our salvation was never an afterthought. The triune God planned our salvation from before the beginning. This is the first cause of our hope. The God who loves us into living was planning our salvation before time began. God has always loved us, even when we didn't exist.

The second cause of our hope is a little different. We read about it in our Epistle Lesson.

In the early church, living a Christian life could have serious consequences. Living as Jesus wants us to could lead to genuine suffering. Expelled from the synagogue, beatings, even crucifixion.

Today, in America, we won't be crucified but living as Jesus wants us to can lead to serious pushback. There will be consequences. If we turn down an invitation for something on a Sunday morning because that's when we worship our God, there can well be repercussions. If we use our break time at work to read our Bible and pray, we'll likely be talked about. If we refuse to go along with the boss's plan for cooking the books and stealing from the customer, we'll likely suffer for it.

Suffering is bad. No one likes to suffer. But when it comes, we Christians meet it with patience, with fortitude. We meet our suffering with an attitude of 'keep calm and carry on'. Keep calm and carry on living the life of the Gospel because this is how Jesus

wants us to live. Don't give in, keep calm and keep being a witness to the Good News.

Carrying on in the face of suffering does something for us. It creates character. Carrying on in the face of suffering creates people who do not cringe or wilt but who persevere. People who have a positive attitude.

And these are the people living lives of hope. Not fatalism or shallow optimism, but lives of genuine hope.

Our hope as Christians is not the hope of a student who didn't study. Our hope as Christians is not the hope of those who have never suffered for their faith. When we as Christians suffer the consequences of being true to Jesus, when we face that suffering with calm resolve, we develop character. We become the kind of people who calmly rely on our eternal God to watch over us. We become the kind of people who have reason to hope. Not foolish optimism but genuine hope based on our experience of the God who has loved from before the beginning of time.

It's easy to give up on the world. War. Climate Change. Inflation. Racial injustice. Innocent strangers shot down in cold blood. Our political class tearing each other's throats rather than working together.

Thank God for Christians. We have something the world needs. We have hope. We have hope that is rooted and grounded from the beginning. We know before the Big Bang, our Triune God was planning our salvation.

We have hope rooted and grounded in our experience of God's presence and love in our suffering, our patient endurance, our firm character and our resolve to live a life of hope surrounded by love.

My friends, fatalism is not a Christian virtue. Sunny optimism is not a Christian virtue. But hope, hope grounded in the love of the triune God, hope grounded in our experience living the life of Jesus, hope is a Christian virtue.

Thanks be to God for the blessing of hope. May we share it freely and well. Amen.