

A Reason for Hope...

Chapel Message by President Jack Haye

February 27, 2019

These are tender days for our community. We are a rag tag group who laughs together, prays together, agonizes over papers together (and yes, the faculty agonizes too because they have to read what you write), dress up like *Heroes and Villains* and swing dance the night away together, and now we are a rag tag group of people who are blessed to mourn together.

Blessing and **mourning** seem odd companions in the same sentence and yet Jesus clearly taught:

“Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4)

But how do these seemingly disparate things fit together? Surely blessings equate to good things. How odd Jesus’ words must have sounded to those gathered on the hillside that day.

Indeed, how odd they sound to us today because they challenge us to consider an upside down world where blessings are somehow found in the midst of circumstances that we would think just need to be fixed.

But perhaps it is in those moments that we are confronted most clearly with our need for God.

Those that mourn, the humble, those who are experiencing injustice, those who are persecuted all know the sense of helplessness that comes when life and circumstances spin out of control.

But if God is in the mix of all things, as He surely is, then what are the connectors between *blessing*, *mourning*, and *comfort*? **Faith** and **Hope**.

Faith that God can always be counted upon to do what He has promised (not necessarily what we wish He had promised), but what He has actually promised in His Word.

Hope that one day all will be set right. No more sickness, no more death, no more injustice.

Hebrews 11:1.

“Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen.”

But this is not a Hallmark card kind of hope. It is a hope born of confidence. It is a hope that is deeply rooted in Christ and His finished work on the cross.

1 Peter 3:15.

*“But in your hearts revere Christ as LORD. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the **reason for the hope** that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”*

He is the reason for our hope.

Hebrews 4:16 makes this promise clear:

“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Through faith in His life, death, burial, and resurrection we are given access to approach God and receive two things: **mercy** and **grace** to help us in our time of need.

Our need today is great, but so is His promise of mercy and grace.

The last part of **Matthew 5:4** attests to this promise *“Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.”*

Comfort doesn’t mean that the pain goes away. It doesn’t mean that things can be rewound as if they had never happened.

Comfort comes in the form of God’s presence. **Psalm 34:18** says that *“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”* That is who we are as a community today. And yet, we are promised that God is close at hand, sharing our grief.

Because of His nearness, our hearts can begin to settle as we hear Him say, as He did to His disciples caught in a terrible storm, *“Don’t be afraid. I am here.”*

When tragedy comes, we naturally want answers. Why did this happen? Where is the rhyme or reason? Dr. G’s passing took us all by surprise. But it did not take our Heavenly Father by surprise at all.

He looked upon Dr. G in His lovingkindness and whispered, “Wake up, Frank. It’s Sunday. You’re home.”

Our grief is for our loss, not for Dr. G because he is in the presence of the LORD, whole and complete. No more broken down vans to deal with, no more papers to grade, no more weakness in his body. Only joy. Joy that comes from **hopes** fulfilled.

Dr. Guliuzza had complete confidence in where he would be when he stepped from the side-wings on to the real stage of eternity. The object of his hope was both deeply rooted and secure.

For you see, it’s not enough to have faith. The object of your faith must be right. I can believe with all sincerity that I can fly if suited with a particular Super Hero cape. But my faith and trust would be better placed in an airplane than in a cape. One has a much better chance of getting me to where I want to go.

What is that you are placing your faith and trust in? Getting a great job? Going to a top tier law or graduate school? Finding a husband or wife?

All are these are good things, but they can easily become ultimate things, which is the definition of idolatry. Another way of asking that is to say: What would you say are the things that you value most? More telling, what would those who know you best say are the things that you value most?

Where does growing deeper in your faith fit into that equation? Is it even on the radar screen or is it buried somewhere in stacks of “things I’ll get to some day when I have time.”

Times of loss, especially unexpected loss, bring the brevity of life into clear relief. We are confronted with the big questions of meaning and purpose.

As followers of Christ, we are people of **hope**. Our hope is based in the person of Jesus Christ who has provided that way for us to be reconciled with our Heavenly Father. We give evidence of that **hope** to a watching world as we walk through personal loss and tragedies.

Our reactions just don’t seem to make sense. Paul put it more prosaically when he wrote in **Philippians 4:7** that “*the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*”

He has promised us His presence here and His presence when Sunday arrives for each of us. We can trust His promises day by day, moment by moment. The **pain** is real, but so is the **promise**.

Psalm 46:1-2 declares, “*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea...*”

In 1858 a Lutheran pastor and his daughter were crossing a Swedish lake when suddenly the boat lurched and the father fell overboard and drowned. His daughter, 26 year old Carolina Sandell Berg, was devastated and began to pour her heart out to God in the form of poems that would later be set to music as hymns. Over her lifetime, she would compose over 650 hymns, many of which would be influential in the revival that swept across Scandinavia in the later part of the 19th century.

It all started with her attempts to sift and sort her grief through a clear lens of faith.

In one of them, "Day by Day," she had this to say:

*"Day by day and with each passing moment,
Strength I find to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment,
I've no cause for worry or for fear."*

Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment, I've no cause for worry or for fear... We can trust God in the good times and bad. He is there during times of great clarity and times of profound confusion, quietly reminding us: “*I’m here. Don’t be afraid.*”

I would like to close our time together this morning by singing this hymn together. Page 718,

*Day by day and with each passing moment
Strength I find to meet my trials here
Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment
I've no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what He deems best*

*Lovingly, it's part of pain and pleasure
Mingling toil with peace and rest*

*Every day, the LORD Himself is near me
With a special mercy for each hour
All my cares He fain would bear and cheer me
He whose name is Counselor and Pow'r
The protection of the His child and treasure
Is a charge that on Himself He laid
"As your days, your strength shall be in measure". (Deut 33:25)
This the pledge to me He made.*

*Help me then in every tribulation
So to trust Your promises O LORD
That I lose not faith's sweet consolation
Offered me within Your Holy Word
Help me, LORD, when toil and trouble meeting
E'er to take as from a Father's Hand.
One by one, the days, the moments fleeting
Til I reach the Promised Land*

Let's pray.

Father our hearts are broken and yet in our brokenness we know that you are near. Please bind up our hearts. Help us to trust You more. To know that Your promises are sure and Your mercies great.

We are leaning on You, Father, as our Rock and Sure Foundation.

In the name of Him who came and died that we might have both the hope and the assurance of eternal life with You.

Amen