The Path to Hope:
April 26, 2020

I think life has taught me...
To be a bit of a realist.

You show me a cup...
With some water in it...
And ask me...
If it’s half full...
Or half empty…

I say… who’s cares?
It’s water.
Water is good.
We need water to live...
Someone should drink that water.

That’s reality to me.

I think it comes from a difficult childhood.
Not going to get into all that.

But I will tell you...
That the situation and setting...
In which I grew up…

Taught me to accept life...
The way that it is.

Because…
In that setting…
I had to be ready…
For whatever MIGHT happen.

So if it were something difficult.
I had to figure out…
How I was going to get through...
That difficult obstacle…
And end up ok…
On the other side.

If it were something wonderful.
I had to figure out…
How to let down my defenses…
For a long enough time…
To enjoy the moment.
And embrace the goodness…
Right in front of me.

As a result of dealing with life like that…
Over time…
I became somewhat a realist.
But... just so you know...
That's not the whole story...
My mind is a bit partitioned.

Into those daily things...
That happen.
Good and bad.
Happy and sad.

And dealing with those things...
Immediately... in the best way that I can.
Here in reality...

Is one part of my life...

But there's another part...
A part that is outside of me.
A part that doesn't belong to me.
It's not my possession...
It's not my mind.

It's bigger than my individual life.

It's a hope...
In the ever-present...
Power of God...
To intervene in the NOW...

You all know... how God can intervene in the NOW...
You've experienced it...
Just a couple examples...

Simple acts of kindness...
That reveal God's love.
We see them happening...
Every single day.

Flowers... that open up and bloom...
Without our intervention...
Without instructions...
Without any other influence...
Than being what God created them to be.

Babies... right... that are born...
That right now... right here...
In this present time...
Reveal the power of God...
To continue to create and to breathe life...
Into this world.

And even death... in a way...
When a life has been lived...
Full of grace and goodness...
And the death... comes peacefully...
Maybe not for the person who has died...
But with a sense of peace...
For those of us...
Who are witnesses...

That God has blessed us... this world...
By the life that was lived.

Thank you Kelly.
Thank you Vernette.

And how about... our Daily Bread.
Up here... looking at the mountains...
And thinking about the sunset... and sunrise...

Reminds me...
Of Lamentations 3:22—23...

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

But there's another kind of hope...
Not how God is acting in the NOW...
But how God is going to...
Bring it all home...
In the NOT YET.
The days yet to come.

I believe... with all my heart...
That this present reality...
With everything we know...

Will one day be fulfilled...
Will one day be completely healed...
Will one day be taken over...
By a glory...
And a wonder...
And a love...
And a fullness of the presence of God...
That our minds...
Have absolutely no way...
To understand right now.

The day's a coming.
And that promise is...
In me too.

And it causes me to...
HOPE.
So these two friends of Christ.
I say friends... but what we learn from the gospel is...
They knew... who Jesus was...
What he was doing...
What they were expecting...

They were very familiar...
With the life and death of Jesus.

But did you notice...
When the stranger engaged them...
In a conversation...

They first... told the stranger...
Everything they knew...
About Jesus...

And then they said...
The words of the broken-hearted.

They said...
WE HAD HOPED.

Did you notice...
It was past tense for them. HAD HOPED.
It was done. Their hope was gone.
Their hearts were dead.

Doesn't that make you sad.
To know... that these followers of Christ...
Were walking along the path... of despair...
Completely without hope.

But we know what happened... next...
Jesus had to jump start their faith.
Had to jump start their hope...

He proclaimed the Word to them.
He told them all about... himself...
About the promise that God made...
To the people of God...

Starting way back... with Moses...
And going through the prophets...

He spoke all the promises to them.

And then...

He proclaimed the Word to them...
Through the breaking of the bread...
Through the sacrament...
The sacred act... of eating together...
That reminded them…
Of the day they were together…
With him… breaking bread…
And he made the connection…

Between the bread and wine…
And his body and blood…
And his real presence… with them…
HE WAS WITH THEM.

And even now.
Even in their doubt.
And fear.

Even when they were completely hopeless…
He was there.
And their eyes were opened.
They recognized him.
And then… in an instant…
He was gone.

Because that’s the way it works.
When angels bring good news…
They don’t hang out…
And make sure you’re ok.

They say what they have to say…
And then they go back to God.

And Jesus did the same thing.
He did what he came to do.
He gave them a vision…
Of life with him.

And it changed their hearts!

They looked at each other and said…
Did our hearts not BURN…
While he was talking to us.

And they ran…
Back to Jerusalem…
Along the path of despair…
Which had now become…
The path of hope.

And they proclaimed Christ…
Risen from the dead.

So how is this relevant to us today?
Seems pretty obvious to me.
We are people...
Who live in the NOW...
And in the NOT YET...
And sometimes...
Because life can be difficult...
Or not go the way...
We want it to go...

We can become bitter...
And critical and catty...
Toward other people...
Whom we are called to LOVE.

We can become so sad...
That we don’t see any light...
At the end of the tunnel.

We can become so focused...
On the pain and the sorrow...
Of our own experience...

That we don’t we look up.

That we don’t move forward.

That we don’t hold onto...
The hope we have in Christ.

Hope that things will be different.

Hope that life will return...
To some semblance of normal.

Hope that with time...
The pain of my heart...
And confusion of my mind...
Will clarify... and lift...

Like a heavy fog...
Burns away...
By the power of the sun.

To live without hope...
In my opinion...
Leaves us... on our own...
And that leads to nothing...
Other than...
Emptiness.

So the word for today...
Is really pretty simple.

Don’t give up HOPE.
God is bigger than...
The ups and downs...
Of any given day.

Trust that God has surrounded you...
With people who love you...
People who will be strong for you...
When you can’t be strong for yourself.

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Don’t give up HOPE.

Don’t think…
That any current circumstance…
Gets the last word…
On your life.

Right? I mean…
If DEATH does not get the last word…
On the life of Jesus.

And we belong to him.
And he belongs to us.

How can we NOT believe…
How can we NOT hope…
That every single promise he made…
Is the HONEST TO GOD TRUTH.

And our real life…
Is beyond the circumstances of any given day.
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Don’t give up HOPE.
See that Christ is with you.
Let your eyes be opened…
Let the Word sink deeply into your heart.

Let the vision of his presence…
In our daily life…
Inspire you…
To believe.

And let the love of Jesus…
JUMP START your HEART…

Let the Holy Spirit…
Burn inside of you.

And run… don’t walk…
Run down the path of HOPE…
And proclaim the truth…
That we know.

Christ is ALIVE.
If you dare to hope...
I will too.

And together...
Our hearts will burn...
And we will see Jesus...
In our midst.

Thanks be to God.
Amen!