

What about you?

Mark 8:27-30

September 13, 2015

*Hope is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all*
(Emily Dickinson)

The wings of hope carry us, soaring high above the driving winds of life.
(Ana Jacob)

Meanwhile, these three remain: faith, hope, and love.
(Paul, the apostle)

To live without hope is to cease to live.
(Fyodor Dostoyevsky)

Can you imagine living without hope? Simply existing day after day, going through the motions, nothing to look forward to, nothing to believe in, except that you know that tomorrow will bring only more of the same?

Or making making reckless choices, indulging in risky behaviors, because it really doesn't matter, what you do or don't do doesn't matter, because your life isn't going to get any better anyway?

Or shrinking your horizons, not worrying about anything beyond the walls of your house or the boundaries of your town, taking care of yourself and those close to you, because there is nothing you can do to make a difference, because you have no hope that things or people will change? Haters are going to hate, takers are going to take, abusers are going to abuse, and there is nothing you can do about it except to try to stay out of their way ...

Can you imagine living without hope? People do. It is a terrible way to live, without hope, like not living at all, but people do. What can we do for them? How can we give them hope?

We can't. We can't because of what hope is. Hope is a frame of mind, an orientation of the spirit, a consciously adopted way of engaging the circumstances of life as they are, whatever they are. Hope is a choice.

And because hope is a choice, you can't give hope to anybody else. But you can plant a seed. You can plant seeds of hope.

You can't give hope to a family of Syrian refugees fleeing the violence ravaging their homeland, but you can plant a seed. You can open your borders. You can tell the leaders of our nation, you can tell the governor of our state, to open our borders and let the people come. And you can open the borders of your heart. Just knowing that there are people who take notice, that there are people who care, is a seed of hope.

You can't give hope to a friend living with a chronic illness, but you can plant a seed. You can be present, physically present, with words or without words, but there, hard evidence to your friend that she is not alone in the struggle.

You can't give hope to a floundering middle-schooler, awkward, self-conscious, unsure of himself, but you can plant a seed. You can create opportunities for him to show his stuff, to try something new, to take a chance, to shine. Isn't this what Greg does?

You can't give hope to good people who worry that their church is slipping away as people age and culture changes and traditions fade, but you can plant a seed. You can be here. You can be here, all in, fully engaged, living each day not as if our days are numbered, but living each day as if this is just the beginning of a new and wonderful adventure, because it is! Isn't this what Kathleen is doing? Isn't this what you are doing? Planting seeds of hope?

Can you imagine living without hope? Maybe you can. Maybe you can because you are, because you are living without hope -- without hope for the future of this world, without hope for the future of this church, without hope for your own future. If you are living without hope, I cannot give you hope, but I can plant a seed. And this is the seed ...

Who do people say that I am?

The disciples have seen enough, the people of the land have seen enough, to have an opinion. Jesus has astonished them. Jesus has amazed them. Jesus has provoked them. Jesus has exposed them.

Some say you are John the Baptist ...

A voice crying in the wilderness, urging people to turn their lives around and get ready for God's kingdom.

Some say you are Elijah ...

Performing wonders, challenging the powers that be, championing the cause of a beleaguered people.

Some say you are a prophet ...

Tearing down the facade of a shallow self-serving faith, extolling the matchless might and boundless compassion of Almighty God, proffering a breathtaking vision of hope.

But what about you? That's what Jesus says: "What about you?"

Who do you say I am?

Peter had an answer, but that was Peter's answer, not yours. What about you? It is your answer that matters: your choice, your belief, your faith, your hope. You have seen him. You have heard him. Who do you say he is?

Your answer to that question will make all the difference -- all the difference -- because Messiah is hope. Asking the question is planting the seed, but it is you who must tend the seed and let it grow in you, let it grow to the full fruition of hope in you.

Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope, and love. May these three remain in you. May you choose faith and choose love and choose hope. And having hope in you, may you plant seeds of hope in those around you.

This is our theme for fall, for the worship services from now until Thanksgiving: planting seeds of hope. We will watch Jesus and listen to Jesus as Mark tells his story, gathering the seeds of hope along the way: hope among the children, hope among strangers who are really friends, hope along a way that is both easier and harder than it seems, hope in a world turned upside down, hope in embodying a different way, hope in healing, hope in knowing what matters most, hope in knowing that what you have and what you are is enough, hope in the midst of the pain of childbirth, hope in knowing that he is coming.

Jesus is coming. He is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul and sings the tune without the words and never stops. Never stops ...