

THE POWER OF HOPE

Wednesday, Dec. 13, 2023

Rev. Richard Rogers

Alright; you ready? [Congregation: "Yes!"]

So I want to thank Richard for coming in last Wednesday as we started our Christmas celebration. And I want to take one more step. I want to talk about **HOPE** tonight.

And I want to talk about hope ... [Laughs] I'm going to start with a bar commercial. [Congregants laugh] Now, this isn't usually the way I start holiday celebrations: with bar commercials. But I want to show this one. Can we? Are you guys ready? Let's go. Here ...

[Plays commercial with mournful music in background]

Okay. What do you think? So here's the deal, right? I want you to see that, historically, there's been two institutions in our culture that have been about building community. True? One of them has been the church, and one of them has been your local bar. And the reason that people would often go to a bar is: the bar was more fun than their church. [Congregants laugh] And the bar had less rules on who was going to get in. Because the bar only had one rule: you've got to pay your bar bill. If you pay your bar bill, pretty much everybody gets in.

And I want you to see -- especially during the holiday season -- how important community is. And how much we need community. We do! We all need community! We're people of the litter, and we need our litter around us.

And this holiday season, I want you to be looking for those people in and around your life who are feeling alone. And I want you to reach out to them! Invite them to church; invite them into your life; invite them into a meal. I want you to be reaching out and looking for those people who feel disconnected now.

Because this is the role, historically, that church was always supposed to play. We were supposed to be that gathering place where people could come and be connected and be loved and feel the presence of God. And when the church didn't do it well -- and many times we didn't! -- and many people didn't feel worthy of coming in, that they had to find other ways. And many times they felt disconnected.

During this holiday season, I'm going to ask you to keep your eyes open for the people in your life that need -- that want -- more community.

And I just love this commercial! I saw it; I wanted to show it and bring it into the worship experience. Because ... And I want us to look at this from a metaphysical point of view. Rev. Kim did a great job yesterday doing the metaphysics of Christmas; it was fabulous. But I want to look at the story again. So can we play this one more time? Can you hit the button again? One minute. They're working. Here it comes; there it goes.

[Plays commercial again with mournful music in the background]

Okay. So I believe that's a story of hope. And I want to kind of slow it down, so we can look at it maybe with new eyes. So the first scene in that little commercial, right? Is he's bringing flowers to a graveside. Right? And I want you to really open to an experience of that. That there was somebody that was so important to him, and he was celebrating their love, their relationship, what that person was for him. And he's bringing flowers to remember. To celebrate all that had gone on before.

And then what he begins to do is to walk the streets. And as he's walking the streets, he's doing it from a place of hope. He's trying to engage the people around him in a relationship and a connection. He's

trying to engage them. And the first young girls walk by and they blow him off. And then the man reading the newspaper blows him off. And he just keeps going, because hope is so present for him, he just will not stop and go home and be depressed.

How many of us have ever given up on our hopes and our dreams and our desires, and just gone home to be depressed in the quiet comfort of our own home? Right? And he refuses!

So he's walking down the street, and there's this dog that stops at the door of the pub and won't let his people go forward. And so his people see their dog stopped at the door of the pub, and they think, "Well, let's go in!" Right? So they go in; they go up to the bar; they order a drink. The man goes in and gets a table; sits down.

And the dog, I believe, metaphysically represents God. Just switch two letters, right? [*Congregants laugh*] We're right there! Right? [*Laughs*] We're so close, right? But I think that the dog represents God. Because the dog then goes to the man and engages him. And in the presence of the dog engaging him, his people are finally smart enough to come over. And then what happens? Now we've got a moment! We've got an experience! We've got a relationship. Magic begins to happen!

And I want you to see over and over and over again in your life that, without hope, there is no magic. That hope is a requirement for magic.

And many people believe, "Well, hope, Richard; it's kind of just weak." Right? "Hope's kind of wimpy; it's not faith. Faith can move mountains! Hope is just kind of dishwater." [*Congregants laugh*]

But what I want you to see is that hope is amazing! Because when you've been knocked down by life; when you've known pain and limitation; the fact that you can hope is no less than a miracle. When you've been disappointed by life, and you allow yourself to have the hope to believe that a greater possibility is possible for you, that is no small thing!

And what I want you to see is: wherever you are in your life, without hope, you're at as good as it's every going to get. Because without hope, we just keep living the same life over and over and over again. And it is a requirement that we actually hope and hope expands the possibilities.

Now, hope doesn't know how it's going to work! It doesn't! Hope does not know how it's going to work. But hope knows that God does! And if we're willing to hope, God opens the door in ways in our life that we cannot even imagine. That over and over again, hope is not rational. It doesn't make sense why we would hope if we have been disappointed by life. It doesn't make sense why you would hope if you've been knocked down by life. You would just give up and die.

And many of us have thought that was the best option. Has everybody had that experience at least once in your life? Where you've been so knocked down by life that just falling over and dying looks like it makes more sense than trying to get up again?

And yet, something inside of us -- it is that activity of God that inspires us to hope again. And we get up and we move forward. Even when we have no idea how it's going to work! Even when it doesn't make sense to hope, our soul is expanding.

You know one of the principles that I teach that I truly believe in is that our soul only does one of two things: it either expands or it contracts. Hope is the expanding activity of your spirit. Because without hope, we'd dwindle and die.

Without hope and a greater way and a greater possibility and a greater day, without hope, there's no reason to get up in the morning.

And you can see that in one another. You can see that when you look into someone's eyes and they've given up. They've given up hope. You can see that slow, slow process of contracting into a smaller and smaller life. That's not hope!

Hope is that power that invites a child to sit on Santa's lap and, even though they have no idea how it's going to work, they have the courage to sit on Santa's lap and to share their greatest dream and just assume that it's going to work out!

And it doesn't always make sense. But we need to challenge ourselves. We need to challenge ourselves today to hope. To hope for a greater day; to hope for a greater possibility; to hope for our hopes and dreams. To hope and to know that, as we hope, it allows God to be God. That's our job! Our job -- especially during this Christmas season as we complete this year and as we look into the new year -- our job is to stand in hope of a possibility that is greater than we would ever have known.

I mean, how would God bless you without hope? Without hope, you would just live the same life over and over again, even though it would be God's will for each and every one of us to be wildly blessed. But we have to open the door to hope, and hope moves things.

Helen Keller said this: *"Nothing can be done without hope."*

Martin Luther King said it this way: *"We must accept finite disappointments, but never lose infinite hope."*

Magic Johnson said this: *"All kids need a little help, a little hope, and someone who believes in them."*

Charles Dickens said, *"It is always something to know you've done the most you could do. But don't leave off hoping, or it's no use doing anything. Hope! Hope; hope to the end. Hope to the last!"*

Emily Dickinson said, *"Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in your soul and sings a tune without words and will never stop at all."*

See, I want us to really challenge ourselves. Because the difficulty with being a spiritual being when we get too smart ... [*Congregants laugh*] The challenge is, when we get too smart, we have to make sure that everything makes sense. So we create a plan; we create strategies. We tell ourselves how it's all going to work.

Have you ever had a goal or a desire work the way you thought it was going to work? [*Congregants laugh*] For most of us, it doesn't go that way! We create this plan in our head -- how life's going to go and how it's all going to work -- and we just assume that that's really the way it's going to work. But it rarely works that way! It doesn't work that way at all for most of us!

But the moment we are willing to suspend our disbelief and to move into hope, in that moment, God can bless us in ways really too numerous to name.

So when you look at your life -- and this is hard sometimes! -- where have you given up hope? Where has hope been reduced to a non-existent thing that you've put in a closet somewhere? When you look at your life, do you have a hope for a greater day? Do you believe that there are possibilities in ways that God could bless you that you've never experienced before? Where are you with hope? Is hope alive and well within you? That cause you to get up every morning with an excitement and an enthusiasm to see what good God has for you today?

Hope is that thing! Hope requires a level of enthusiasm!

Isaiah 40:31: *"But for those who hope in the Lord, he will renew their strength. They will soar on eagles' wings; they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not be faint."*

Like, there's this idea that -- to be your best; to experience all the good that God has for you -- we have to hope for a life that is better than we have known. And it is hard! When you've known disappointment, when you've known failure, when you've known lack and limitation ... When life has banged on you ... When you feel like you've been knocked down, it is hard to hope. It seems childish. It seems immature. It seems stupid.

But without hope, we stay on the ground. With hope, we will get up over and over again until we have experienced all the good that God has promised us.

The Psalm 71: *"As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more."*

And probably the most powerful Scripture on hope: *"Christ in you, your hope of glory."* That God in you is your hope for glory!

And it's hard! It's hard to hope when your mind wants to talk you out of it. When hoping seems so immature and simply ridiculous. But without hope, nothing changes. Nothing gets better. And we deny the very activity of Spirit that wants to bless us.

Today, where are you willing to call forth and rekindle hope? Because hope will demand that you expand your life.

"I hope."

Will you say that with me? *[With congregation]: "I hope."*

See, hope and faith ideally work together. Hope is the expanding spiritual principle, while faith is the creative spiritual principle. And actually, we need both of them. Hope opens the door, but then faith allows us the power to move through.

Reading from Hebrews 11: *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not yet seen. For by it, the men of old received divine approval. By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that which is seen is made out of the things which do not yet appear."*

Faith is the creative power that uses the power of the word to call forth a greater reality. But without hope, you never speak the word! You never activate that level of faith. Faith is the power of the word.

"I am whole and well."

Will you say that with me? *[With congregation]: "I am whole and well."*

One more time with more power!

[With congregation]: "I am whole and well."

"I prosper!"

Together: *[With congregation] "I prosper!"*

"I am loved!"

Together: *[with congregation] "I am loved!"*

"I am divinely guided!"

Together: *[with congregation] "I am divinely guided!"*

"All things work together for my highest good."

Together: *[with congregation] "All things work together for my highest good."*

And I want you to feel the power of faith! And hope doesn't take anything away from faith; we need faith! But without hope, we never open the door.

Tonight I'm going to challenge you. Really, I want to challenge you to look in your life and see the places where you've given up hope. It could be in your family; it could be in your work; it could be in your health. I want to challenge you to really look at the places where you've given up hope.

And I want to actually dare you this holiday season -- this Christmas season -- I want to dare you to move back into hope. To confront the self-talk. To confront the rational part of your mind that wants to tell you it's no use; it doesn't make sense. And allow yourself to move into hope. That God's not done with you. That God has greater good for each and every one of us. And that, I believe, that hope is a requirement to live a profoundly blessed life. Without hope, we simply give up and slowly die.

"I am willing to hope."

Will you say that with me? [With congregation]: *"I am willing to hope."*

Will you pray with me?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. That there is but one presence and one power: God the good. And today we stand in complete hope: divine hope; childish hope; pure hope; a hope that believes that God is at work in our life, even when we don't understand how. A hope that allow us to get back up off the floor when we've been knocked down. A hope that inspires us to dream again; to believe again; to live again; to love again. And to make our dreams a reality.

Tonight, I call forth divine hope for each and every one of us. And we see a world where every man, woman and child is willing to live in hope. In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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