

Hope

by Nick Strobel at [Wesley UMC](#) on May 28, 2017

Let us begin with a word of prayer.

Loving God,

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

Today is the last Sunday of the Easter season. Next Sunday we will celebrate Pentecost with a tongues of fire chili lunch after worship and we'll see if Pastor Anne will wear the big red Pentecost head piece. That thing is about a quarter her height!

The gospel lessons for six of the seven Sundays in the Easter season have been from the Gospel of John. The last three are from the "Farewell Discourse" given by Jesus to his disciples at dinner the night before his crucifixion. In today's passage, Jesus has finished his lessons to the disciples at their last meal together and Jesus lifts them up to God in prayer.

In the Gospel of John, when Jesus talks about "glory"—being glorified and glorifying God—"glory" means the visible manifestation of God's presence and power. The flesh and blood Jesus was the incarnation of God. John's Prologue says, "the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us." Jesus made God real, showing the heart of God with real concrete examples in everyday life.

In this prayer, Jesus is passing on this work to his disciples and all those who love him. We are called to be the visible manifestation of God's presence and power, to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world. Through our ministry of compassion to the world, we show the heart of God to the world. Jesus says in verse 10 "All mine are yours (the Father's), and yours are mine; and I am glorified in them." We glorify God by showing compassion to a hurting world and working to transform the world that God loves into a place where justice and equity are the default option.

Our focus is the work that needs to be done in the here and now not waiting for the afterlife. *[it'd be nice to somehow put in Matt 20:1-16 about laborers in the vineyard—the reward is working in the vineyard, not the payment at the end.]*

In verse 3 Jesus tells us what is eternal life: that we may know the only true God and Jesus Christ sent by the Father. This knowledge of God in the here and now comes through practice of prayer and study of the Bible and service to others. The *practice* of prayer, study, and service makes God *practical* in everyday life.

Karoline Lewis concluded her essay on this passage of John on the Working Preacher website from Luther Seminary with this challenge, “What if we imagined that the resurrection of Jesus was just the beginning and not the conclusion of the Gospel? That the promises of the resurrection are, in part, ours to fulfill? How would a life of discipleship, of witness, of love, between Pentecost and Advent, be different were we to trust that Jesus meant what he said in 14:12, ‘Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.’ We are in the world now, the world that God loves (3:16).”

Our focus on the work that needs to be done in the here and now is why we donate food items for our pantry which is run out of the church office. It is why we open The Gathering Place kitchen up to the Bakersfield Burrito Project free of charge, absorbing the cost of the electrical, gas, and water utilities. It is why we go to the Bakersfield Homeless Center on the fifth Sunday of a month.

Personally, for me, my teaching at Bakersfield College is an outgrowth of my faith because I believe that education transforms lives for the better. It is my ministry to the world. (And, yes, it is also fun being able to teach about stuff that is truly out of this world.)

I especially like Valerie Schultz’s column in yesterday’s Californian because of how she applied one of my favorite teachings of Jesus to the health care legislation being developed in Congress. She used the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46 to answer “what would Jesus do?” in what our government should do for its citizens, particularly for those who don’t have power and money. She noted, “These principles of social justice are not suggestions. On the contrary, they are the requirements of faith. Jesus’s message is blunt: We are, quite literally, to care for each other. We are our brother’s and sister’s keeper, even in our modern world, thousands of years removed from a time when the comparison of sheep and goats had any practical application.”

However, sometimes (many times?) the service to others can be frustrating, disappointing, or maybe risky and dangerous. The last sentence of today's Gospel reading is Jesus praying "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." With all the worship of money, power and selfishness seemingly infusing everything in politics and entertainment today, it can seem a hopeless task we're engaged in. The rancor and divisiveness of the secular politics of today is also seen in the connective life of the United Methodist Church as a whole. I saw that clearly at General Conference 2016 that was held up in Portland a year ago. We need God's protection from the temptation to deal with our disagreements in the same way that the world deals with its disagreements. Notice that I did *not* say, "the way world *solves* its disagreements".

Now that the semester is over for me at Bakersfield College, I've had some time to listen to some of the episodes of the TED Radio Hour on NPR's website. The radio show is based on recent TED talks that cover all sorts of creative ideas. Somehow by following some links off one of the episodes, I managed to stumble across the [TED talk that Pope Francis gave at the TED 2017 conference](#) in April. His talk was titled "Why the only future worth building includes everyone".

I really like this pope and I encourage you to check out his TED talk. One particular section I want to share with you is about hope. (To paraphrase another leader, I decided that I was going to share this with you even before I knew what the scripture lessons were going to be.)

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Many of us, nowadays, seem to believe that a happy future is something impossible to achieve. While such concerns must be taken very seriously, they are not invincible. They can be overcome when we don't lock our door to the outside world. Happiness can only be discovered as a gift of harmony between the whole and each single component. Even science points to an understanding of reality as a place where every element connects and interacts with everything else

We have so much to do, and we must do it together. But how can we do that with all the evil we breathe every day? Thank God, no system can nullify our desire to open up to the good, to compassion and to our capacity to react against evil, all of which stem from deep within our hearts. Now you

might tell me, "Sure, these are beautiful words, but I am not the Good Samaritan, nor Mother Teresa of Calcutta." On the contrary: we are precious, each and every one of us. Each and every one of us is irreplaceable in the eyes of God. Through the darkness of today's conflicts, each and every one of us can become a bright candle, a reminder that light will overcome darkness, and never the other way around.

To Christians, the future does have a name, and its name is Hope. Feeling hopeful does not mean to be optimistically naïve and ignore the tragedy humanity is facing. Hope is the virtue of a heart that doesn't lock itself into darkness, that doesn't dwell on the past, does not simply get by in the present, but is able to see a tomorrow. Hope is the door that opens onto the future. Hope is a humble, hidden seed of life that, with time, will develop into a large tree. It is like some invisible yeast that allows the whole dough to grow, that brings flavor to all aspects of life. And it can do so much, because a tiny flicker of light that feeds on hope is enough to shatter the shield of darkness. A single individual is enough for hope to exist, and that individual can be you. And then there will be another "you," and another "you," and it turns into an "us." And so, does hope begin when we have an "us?" No. Hope began with one "you." When there is an "us," there begins a revolution.

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At the end of our worship service today, we will sing together "Hope of the World", a hymn that puts music to the words crafted by the great Methodist theologian, Georgia Harkness. By opening our hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit, we are able to imagine a tomorrow worth working toward. We are called to be the visible manifestation of God's presence and power, and by making the hopeful choice of an open heart, we are able to show the heart of God to the world as one body of Christ.

Amen.