

Thoughts on Hope....

So, imagine you're at a big family gathering — which I realize isn't possible right now, but this is imagining. It's, like, a big wedding or someone's 60th birthday or whatever, and there are a bunch of relatives you don't know that well.

And you get cornered by this cousin - let's call him Hank.

Hank's the cousin who's always got a bridge he wants to sell you.

And Hank says "Hey, cuz!

Do I have an investment opportunity for you."

And already you know that whatever it is Hank is selling, offering, proposing — you're not going to want anything to do with it.

So, keep that image in mind of Cousin Hank bearing down on you as I tell you the scripture story for this sermon.

We're in Jeremiah, chapter 32.

Jeremiah is a whole big book about, well, Jeremiah.

And this story is about a time when Jeremiah just happened to be in jail, and I'll say more later about how that happened.

Jeremiah's in a jail cell in Jerusalem, in the year 594 BC, and in walks cousin Hank, come to visit him.

Okay, not actually “Hank”, but close. Hanamel.

And Cousin Hanamel says “Cousin Jerry, I have an investment opportunity for you that you are not going to want to pass up.”

And Jeremiah can’t really get away from cousin Hank the way you could maybe easy away at a family gathering... cause he’s in a jail cell.

And so cousin Hanamel says

“I’ve got a field I thought you just might want to buy, Jeremiah, a nice piece of property back in your hometown.

What do you say, Jer?”

So — Here’s what you need to know about why Jeremiah was in jail.

He was in jail because he had incurred the wrath of pretty much every important politician in Jerusalem, up to and including the King.

And the reason they were infuriated was because Jeremiah had had the courage to point out, loudly and publicly, that the country was heading in the wrong direction.

He was the prophet Jeremiah, after all — that’s what prophets did.

Jeremiah had said,

“People, this country’s days are numbered — the Babylonians are heading our way, the barbarians are literally at the gate,

and frankly we *deserve* to lose our country, even it was the promised land once upon a time,
because we messed it up.

We've been oppressing the poor and forgetting God's ways."

Well now, that's treason, said the king, and threw Jeremiah in jail.

So here's Jeremiah, sitting in jail, *knowing* he's right, knowing his beloved country is about to be conquered, that Jerusalem's gone to fall.

And what does he do next?

He invests in it.

He takes Cousin Hank up on his real estate offer.

Jeremiah buys property in a country that he knows is about to be no more.

Jeremiah knows what's about to go down,

and he still says to Cousin Hanamel, "Okay, I'll take that field.

17 shekels? You got it."

The prison guards watching this happen, they're amazed.

Astonished.

The voice of doom himself is investing in real estate? Now?

And Jeremiah says this:

"I'm buying that field because here's what I believe.

I believe that with God nothing is impossible.

I believe that one day fields and houses and vineyards

will again be bought in this land.”

And he tells his cousin to put the deed to the land in a jar,
and bury it in a safe place, for that time to come.

I kinda love this story,
this slightly obscure story about an ancient real estate transaction.
Because when it comes right down to it,
it wasn't so much a piece of land that Jeremiah was buying
as a piece of *hope*.

By buying a field in a land that was yet to be,
he proclaimed hope to everyone who witnessed it.

Jeremiah understand reality, he saw clear-eyed what was around him,
he knew what was wrong,
but he lived into a vision of what was to be.
He lived in hope.

Just over a week ago,
our nation lost a man who had lived in hope,
acted in hope.

He knew what was real, saw clearly what was around him,
but still lived in hope.

A man who in faith gave all he had
to purchase a field in a land that was yet to be.

John Lewis was the youngest person to speak at the March on Washington in 1963, 23 years old.

He led the Selma to Montgomery marches, where he was beaten and bloodied.

Almost 60 years later, one of his last public appearances was at a town hall with young people to talk about George Floyd.

There would have been plenty of reason for discouragement in those six decades,

but John Lewis was *relentlessly* hope-filled.

“You have to have hope,” he said, “in order to keep moving forward.

Be hopeful. Be optimistic. Never lose that sense of hope.

Believe in the power of love.”

If those words sound vaguely familiar right now,

it might be because you watched the worship video that our Junior Deacons put together this week.

For our midweek worship series on Wednesday,

our teens put together a service

that in scripture and poetry and music and reflections

focused on Hope.

On Hope.

And included in the service were all of those words from John Lewis,

read by junior Abby Jacobs.

You have to have hope to keep moving forward.

If you haven't watched the video, you need to.

Just 17 minutes,

but in those seventeen minutes our Junior Deacons reminded us that hope is a theme running through all scripture, anchoring our faith.

Faith, hope and love abide, they read,

Hope is an anchor for the soul, they read.

Those who hope in the Lord shall rise up with wings, like eagles, they shall run and not be weary.

And then Maddy and Bobby and Jack offer up gifts of music to lift the spirit.

And Lily shares a poem of hope, with this most beautiful of final lines —
*across all places or time always there for one to find
like the fibers in a celestial rope this little seed; she is hope*

And Charlie, our Charlie, offers a message straight from the heart, with bravest honesty, reminding us of the power of Philippians 4:13:
I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
In that, says Charlie, is truest hope.

These teens see the world no less clearly than John Lewis did,

than the prophet Jeremiah did.

They know what there is that needs to be changed,
they know what yet needs to be fixed.

They are the generation calling us to attention
in myriad ways;
their urgency is fueling change.

Just like Jeremiah, they see what's wrong.

But they also know what it is to hope,
to live in hope.

The young people around us know what it means
to buy a field in a country that is yet to be.

They know what it means to invest their all in a future that is coming.
They know what it is to hope.

How do you do it?

How do you hope?

Kinda comes back to what Charlie says in his sermon.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Or, think back to about 15 minutes ago,
in my children's message,

when I told the story of Peter the fisherman

who saw miracle happen once he got Jesus into the boat with him.

I can do all things through the One who strengthens me.

I can hope all things for there is One who strengthens me,
who strengthens us,
who never leaves us alone.

I can hope all things because I look to the future
and see that God is there.

This is faith:

you get yourself a piece of hope —
you purchase a field with Jeremiah —
you believe that with God nothing is impossible —
and you live like everything is possible.

In hope.

In Hope.

Amen.