



Worship Service Theme: Hope

Helpful Elements:

Green table covering (Ordinary Time)

Fresh lemons

[If possible, serve lemonade after the service]

Welcome: Welcome! It's so good to be together to celebrate faith and community today. My name is _____ and I'll be leading our worship time. Our theme for today is **hope**. The Bible and our own lives have much to say about hope: what hope is, why we have hope, and how to live in hope.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, we ask your Holy Spirit to bless our time together and refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and as we confess our sins, for forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence today joyfully and reverently, and let us depart with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace that passes all understanding. Amen.

Opening Hymn: Doxology, p. 1

Statement of Faith, p. 2: Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting "The Lord is My Shepherd" together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Hymns:

We Gather Together, p. 3

For the Beauty of the Earth, p. 4

Joyful, Joyful, p. 5

First reading: This is one of the Songs of Ascents (Psalm 30). Many scholars believe that these psalms were sung by pilgrims on the uphill road to Jerusalem.

¹Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!

² O Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

³If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,

O Lord, who could stand?

⁴But with you there is forgiveness,

that you may be feared.

⁵I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,

and in his word I hope;

⁶my soul waits for the Lord

more than watchmen for the morning,

more than watchmen for the morning.

⁷O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,

and with him is plentiful redemption.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:

Jesus Loves Me, p. 6

Oh, How I love Jesus, p. 7

Holy, Holy, Holy, p. 8

Second reading: The apostle Paul writes to the new Roman church (8:23-26):

²³ Not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:

His Eye is on the Sparrow, p. 9

Leaning on the Everlasting Arms, p. 10

Interactive Homily: Let's pause our singing for a moment and think a little more about hope.

- What do you think hope feels like?
 - There seem to be two kinds of hope:
 - Hope in a favorable outcome. This kind of hoping is really wishing, as in "I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow."
 - In the Bible, hope is much more than wishing. Hope is waiting in faith for a future *certainty*. We don't say that we hope the sun will come up tomorrow, because we know it will. That's the biblical sense of hope!
- Let's think about that first sense of hope, the kind that wishes for a favorable outcome. What sorts of things do you hope for? (*let people generate lots of ideas*)
 - A good meal
 - Good weather, especially for an event like a wedding
 - For something to turn out well: a job interview, a recipe
 - That someone is able to visit
 - Peace in the world
- With this kind of hope, does disappointment ever happen?
 - Yes! Favorable outcomes don't always occur, and we're disappointed.
- Sometimes we don't want to hope for things because, understandably, we want to avoid the hurt of disappointment. But what do you think? Is it better to lower your expectations or to hope? What are the pros and cons?

- Hoping can feel risky but exciting, optimistic; it also causes you to work for the good outcome that you want
- Living with low expectations can feel cynical, sad, dull, passive

[Optional: put in your own story of hoping for something; here's mine:] When my son Sam was just a little boy, about 4 years old, he told me one day that he hoped his friend John could come over to play. I knew that it was unlikely, so I told him not to get his hopes up. Sam started to cry and said, "Mom, it makes me feel worse if you say that! You've got to hope for everything!"

That was one of the most profound things I've ever heard, and it actually became our family motto: Hope for Everything.

The Bible writers were clear that our faithful hope has an object. We hope *in someone*: God and his goodness and mercy.

"Biblical hope is different than optimism. Hope rests on something beyond ourselves. It necessitates a faith that God can and will act to set all things right—things that are beyond our capacity to make happen."¹

- In terms of time, what direction does hope take?
 - Hope looks *forward*, not backward.
- And what attitude of the heart does hope have? Positive or negative?
 - Biblical hope looks ahead in a *positive* way, not negative or cynical.
- As you fix your eyes on God, complete this sentence: "Today I look forward in hope for"

... Let's take a moment to silently pray that we would be people of hope, looking forward with confidence in God.

(Silent Prayer) ... Lord, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord's prayer together:

Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

¹ Servant Partners Annual Report 2020. https://www.servantpartners.org/annualreport?fbclid=IwAR3dpvFfHDhhGE5U-ABrvqucOLF2iEh_TUGfG8qDXqOoiPh1ybOK_IfAYA

Hymns:

He's Got the Whole World, p. 12

In the Garden, p. 13

Standing on the Promises, p. 14

Third Reading: Hopeful Poetry [choose one or a few]

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me. — American poet Emily Dickinson

“Hold fast to dreams,
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird,
That cannot fly.” — American writer and poet Langston Hughes

“You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep Spring from coming.” — Chilean writer and poet Pablo Neruda

“There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.” — Canadian singer/songwriter Leonard Cohen

“We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.” — Martin Luther King, Jr.

Hymns:

It is Well with My Soul, p. 15

Amazing Grace, p. 16

Fourth Reading: “Lemons into Lemonade”²

[Hold up a lemon] What does a lemon taste like by itself? Pretty sour, right? But what can you make if you combine lemons with sugar and water?

Have you heard the saying, “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade”? It’s a clever way of encouraging ourselves that there’s always hope in times of trouble.

In 1980, Don Jacobson was 25 years old, happily married, and enjoying a physically demanding job in construction.

But then, unexpectedly, an accident changed Don’s life forever. “After nine agonizing days in the hospital,” he says, “I thought my injuries would keep me from providing for my family.”

It took a while for that big lemon to become lemonade, but in the end, Don was wonderfully blessed. “[Instead of construction,] I began to work in the publishing business. Now I can see that not being able to build things with my hands forced me to work with my head and heart,” he says.

For decades, Don served as president and owner of Multnomah Publishers, where he oversaw the production of more than 1,000 books.

Don says, “When I share my ‘lemons into lemonade’ story with friends, two amazing things happen. My story inspires others and gives them hope. Then, without fail, my friends tell me their lemonade story and I am filled with inspiration all over again.”

Hope can always have the last word. “Stuff happens,” Don says. “But so does lemonade.”

² Adapted from <http://www.christianpost.com/news/god-makes-lemonade-tells-true-life-stories-of-hope-56790/>

Hymns:

When the Saints Go Marching In, p. 17

How Great Thou Art, p. 18

[sing more or fewer songs to fill out the time]

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word "hope")

In place of the traditional blessing, today I'm using this one from St. Paul (Romans 15:13):

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology, Reprise, p. 30

[If possible, serve lemonade!]

Extra material:

Hebrews 11:1: Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.