

LSBC Sermon June 14, 2020 Charlie Fuller

Text: Genesis 18:1-15, (21:1-7) & Romans 5:1-8

Title: *Genuine Hope*

These seem to be crazy times to be talking about hope. Systemic injustice, thousands upon thousands of people dying from a pandemic, chaos in the streets and chaos in our government, divisions among the American people like haven't been seen since the Civil War.

Hope seems to be somewhere hiding out. Maybe hope is sheltering-in-place and we're going to have to wait until hope feels safe enough to come out again.

In today's text hope has gone underground. Hope seems to be hiding out somewhere in the Judean wilderness. Abraham, the one that God promised would be the father of a great nation was well on the way to being the father of *no one*. Who fathers a child in the heights of old age? With a woman whose womb has been barren for decades? Indeed, how in the world could Abraham and Sarah have any hope at all that God was going to come through on the promise? Father of a great nation? They'd be glad for one single child.

New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright says this about hope: Hope, for the Christian, is not wishful thinking or mere blind optimism. It is a mode of knowing, a mode within which *new* things are possible, options are *not* shut down, *new creation* can happen.

In these days that seem devoid of hope, let's think a bit about what it is for which we hope. What do we *really* desire to see come to pass? More importantly, what does God desire to come to pass?

It's easy to rail at the world situation, knowing that there is evil, wrong, and brokenness in the world. For a Jesus follower, for those willing to be called to the core essence of Scripture, it's really not all that difficult to identify and call out wrongdoing, to call out an evil status quo. It's obvious that the world is broken. The world is broken and we're called to declare that the world doesn't look like what God intended.

What's much more difficult is to envision what the world is *supposed* to look like. But God has given us a template, examples, and imagery to guide us.

In today's text, it's the coming of new life where there seemed to be no hope of a family future. In today's text, hope looks like a baby. In other places in Scripture, we're encouraged to look toward lions lying down with lambs, a holy city, a *new* heaven and a *new* earth. One of my favorite images is of a feast. What's more joyful than a community gathering together to eat and to celebrate?

So, we have some guidance about what God's good is for our world. God has sent us some images to help us figure out what it *is* for which we are to hope.

We often forget that many of the icons of the Civil Rights Movement of the 50's and 60's were ministers. Baptist ministers. When they called for equality for all, they were invoking God's new order of the Spirit. They were invoking the great feast where **all** were welcome to the intimacy and vulnerability of eating together.

One of my heroes is Congressman John Lewis of Georgia. A few years ago, I was waiting on a flight in Washington and met him passing through the airport. I was on the phone with Cindy at the time and she got to hear our short interaction. I was awed to be in the presence of such a courageous man. At the age of 23, he was one of six major leaders who spoke at the famous March on Washington in 1963. He's been serving the cause of justice and freedom and equality ever since. He has served in the United State Congress for 33 years.

John Lewis was preparing for a life as a minister when he answered to call to work for justice and freedom. He preached to chickens as a child and he's preached to the entire world ever since. As we hear and work for the call of justice in our lives, we must remember something. The call for equality is a call for human rights. It's a call that rises up even in our biology and the way our brains are wired. And it's just as powerfully a gospel call. It's **Jesus'** call to us evidenced all through Scripture.

I know that when I preach to those gathered here in this Lake Shore gathering, I'm preaching to the choir, so to speak. I know that you agree with me. I know that, as you are able, you use your resources of time, talent, energy, and your money to work for justice and freedom. And for that I'm most grateful. I love being a part of a community that calls for justice. But we can always do more and are called to do more. We are called to never be satisfied until justice and freedom and equality are complete.

We must indeed call for justice if we're working to bring the Kingdom of God to Waco. Authentic faithfulness to Jesus requires no less. When we gather at the great feast, we all get the same lavish meal. We all sit in seats of equal honor. We all get the same level of service. That all means all. Everybody. No distinction.

But here's a hard question: How do we fulfill our calling to love everyone even as we call out for justice and freedom? How in the world do we find it in ourselves to love the people who put their knees on a man's neck and suffocate him? How do we love those who stood by and failed to intervene? How do we love those who are not only satisfied with systems of oppression, but work actively to sustain those systems and protect those systems from redemption?

In the 60's John Lewis was the first chairperson of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. You may have heard them referred to as SNCC. Along with Martin Luther King, they had adopted the principles or values of non-violence. Those principles are:

- **ONE:** Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.
- **TWO:** Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding.
- **THREE:** Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice not people.

- **FOUR:** Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform.
- **FIVE:** Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate.
- **SIX:** Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice.

The principles of Non-violence are the principles of Jesus' gospel. It's not a coincidence that so many of the leaders of the civil rights movement were ministers. And it's not a coincidence that Jesus followers must be at the front of the line doing everything possible to call for equality in love. We must call out violence and injustice through the voice of love, the love that binds all of Creation together.

During one of John Lewis's congressional campaigns the workers had t-shirts with these words of Congressman Lewis: "The beloved community is an all-inclusive society based on simple justice that values the dignity and worth of *every human being*."

As we look toward Juneteeth this Friday, we celebrate *every human being*.

June is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Pride month. During Pride we celebrate *every human being*.

While we are not in the building, our web site homepage is, if you will, the front yard of the church. We've adorned our homepage with images celebrating Black Lives Matter and the rainbow of LGBTQ Pride.

In the Lord's Prayer we ask for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Surely that means that here on earth we will promote the beloved community that Jesus came to create.

Just like God promised, Abraham did indeed become the father of a great nation. And just like God fulfilled the promise to Abraham & Sarah, God will fulfill the promise to us. The promise of a world filled with love, not hate; with peace and not violence; with justice and not institutional oppression.

And we wait – not as those without hope and not as those without much to do. As is often the case, God calls us to participate in the answering of our own prayers. God has empowered us to partner with God to bring God's Kingdom to earth. But we have to know what it is for which we're praying and working. A place that seeks love actively, by calling out the oppressor even as we love the oppressor. The oppressors "out there" and the oppressors inside each of us.

May our hopes be fulfilled, even as those of Abraham and Sarah. May hope begin to peer out from its hiding place, and may hope shine its light around us in ways it never has before.

May it be so,
Amen.