

Sermon – New Hope Bible Fellowship Christmas Service – February 2nd, 2019

By: Samuel Lau

Good afternoon brothers and sisters! I hope you're getting through this winter all right, as this is usually the time of year when seasonal depression really begins to kick in. So, I want to encourage us all to reach out during this time, stay in community, take necessary health precautions, and remember that spring is not far away.

A different kind of sadness has been present this past week, and those of you who were here last week will be aware that Dr. Mary Lou has decided to move to Orlando, Florida, and is now in the process of selling this house. This is a move that will be beneficial for her and for Keith, as the climate is much better and they will be close to family. She and Keith will return in March for the final stages of the transition but I want to take this opportunity to be upfront with our community about this and give us time to process these big changes. As I know many of you can also attest, Dr. Mary Lou's life and ministry has been a tremendous gift to so many people over the years, and this very house we're sitting in right now has been a home away from home. So my sermon today will be a reflection of gratitude and of the way for us to move through such seasons of loss and transition.

This week I've been taking note of the big news item that's gone viral, and found in it a strange resource for processing all of this. Last Sunday, as we were wrapping up our service, we found out about the news of the passing of Kobe Bryant, his daughter, and seven other people in a helicopter crash. This tragic event has spurred an unprecedented outpouring of grief, tribute, and admiration for Kobe Bryant, as well as raising more complicated questions about how we should remember his legacy. This type of shocking sudden event has a way of making people reconsider their lives and their most cherished relationships. Almost unanimously, regardless of what their personal connection to Kobe Bryant or their opinions about him, commentators said that the takeaway message from this tragedy was to cherish every moment you have with your loved ones, because you never know when the end will come.

So as we contemplate the ministry and the community of New Hope Bible Fellowship coming to an end, a couple thoughts come to my mind. First, I am grateful that there is the opportunity to say goodbye. And second, we have a community here that can be with each other through this journey.

This week, as I've been taking in the news about Kobe Bryant's death and begun the process of helping get this house ready for the sale, I've been led to a story of another person who was also leaving behind his loved ones, but, having foreknowledge of how and when that would happen, was able to leave well, and prepare his followers for his exit.

This person is, of course, Jesus. John tells us that when Jesus knew his hour to depart was coming, he loved them to the end. And it is worth taking a look at how Jesus loved them to the end, and how he prepared them for a very important transition in their lives. As many of us

have different transitions to make in the next little while, not just because of New Hope, we could use this kind of instruction.

First, Jesus served his disciples, and instructed them to do the same. We end well by serving one another. Jesus commanded them to love as he loved them, and did so until his last moments. So over the rest of this semester, let us lean into continuing the way we have been taught and what New Hope has been about: providing a place for internationals to have a sense of home and being there to support them in the challenges of student life here.

Second, Jesus gives insight into what is happening, he helps his disciples navigate the disorienting changes they are experiencing by sharing his insight into why he has to die. Likewise, myself and the rest of the staff team will be here to offer some of that, both today and later.

Third, Jesus anticipates where his disciples will fall short. You will recall Peter confidently telling everyone that he would stand by him, and Jesus gently corrects him. It may sound strange, but Jesus knew the grave temptations they were to face shortly. By telling them ahead of time, Jesus helps prepare them for it and they will not lose heart when they have to face up to their own failure. I can't tell the future for you, but there are ways that things like these challenge us, and it is important to consider them ahead of time.

Fourth, Jesus addresses what the disciples are feeling and gives them space to ask him questions. Although there's many questions that come up, and Jesus can't answer all of them, he takes the time he has left with them to speak with his disciples and tells them all that they are able to understand.

Fifth, Jesus, prays for his disciples, and prays so that they can see his heart but also because he knows that it is God the Father who is in control and whose blessing will make the difference in the future. So he prays for himself, the disciples, and all those who follow him. As we consider the future after New Hope, let us lift up our concerns to God, entrusting ourselves to Him, and pray for those who will follow us.

So before we continue, I want to invite you to share what this news means to you, what this church means to you and how you are taking the news.