

Hope: The Lord Has Done Great Things for Us

Psalm 126: 1-3

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
We were like those who dreamed.
Our mouths were filled with laughter,
Our tongues with songs of joy.
Then it was said among the nations,
"The Lord has done great things for them."
The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.*

I love music, especially music that can transport my mind to some place. One of Keith's favorite songs is "How Are Things in Glocca Mora?" that sometimes he sings at the dining table. It is a song about a fictional village in Ireland with themes of nostalgia and homesickness. If you let yourself be drifted away by its beautiful tunes and lyrics, I'm sure you'll be transported to some far-away place that is intimate and familiar to you. Check out some of its lyrics:

*I hear a bird, Londonderry bird,
It well may be he's bringing me a cheering word.
I hear a breeze, a River Shanon breeze,
It well may be it's followed me across the seas.
Then tell me please*

*How are things in Glocca Morra?
Is that little brook still leaping there?
oes it still run down to Donny cove?
Through Killybegs, Kilkerry and Kildare?*

*How are things in Glocca Mora?
Is that willow tree still weeping there?
Does that lassie with the twinklin' eye
Come smilin' by and does she walk away,*

My parents are originally from a small island in northwest Sumatera. It is called Nias. I wasn't born and raised there, but my parents were. In 2008, my parents took us four kids to the island. It was my second trip to Nias. Mom and Dad hadn't come back to the island for a long time. I remembered after crossing the strait and landing on the island, my parents' faces were beaming as their childhood memories came back whenever we passed by some mementos from the past. Dad told us about the river where he and his friends bathed when they were kids; Mom told us about her old relatives when we passed an old house by the street. I caught them silent several times. When I asked why they were silent, Mom told me that she was just reminiscing about the good old days.

The good old days, a nostalgia that strongly affects our heart. I found that this human experience is common in every culture. I believe there should be more of it. There should be more to just some good

old days. If every human from every culture, place, language share this same experience, I suspect it should say something about our humanness. For some people they take it for granted. But for those who want to know what it means, often time get frustrated by the unexplainable nature of it. They end up attributing the sensation to some nationalism, patriotism, primordialism, or romanticism. The “good-old-days” speaks profoundly about the deep-seated yearning that humans have had since the Fall. A yearning for **intimacy (who we really are) and beauty (what is good about life)**. We don’t experience these yearnings all the time every day, yet they lurk beneath our mundane lives.

The Bible helps us understand what actually it is when Paul wrote, *“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God”* (Romans 8:21).

I once read that maybe our lives are destined to be an ongoing **“incompletion”** in which we survive by pulling up anything that makes us **hope**. We find it in songs or stories or movies that super romanticize human power to self-attain a sense of purpose, only to find whatever purpose they find is fragile and subject to brokenness - broken relationships, bitterness and despair, injustice, shattered dreams, sickness and death. What is worse is **these signs of brokenness constantly appears** along the way no matter how we try to get rid of them.

With that we need hope, real hope that enables us to move along gracefully down our lifeline, noticing that **life indeed is broken yet beautiful**.

Real Hope

In Christianity the real hope is in God himself who took on flesh. We know him by the name of Jesus. Why Jesus? Because the Bible tells us *in him dwells all the fullness of the Deity in bodily form* (Col 2:9). In Christ, we have been brought to fullness (Col.2:10). In Christ, hope helps us be strong, like a house built on the rock so that we are not destroyed when life’s uncertainties, despairs, and disappointments assail us (Matthew 7:24-27). In Christ, we find a wounded God who *is able to empathize with our weaknesses because He has been tempted just as we are – yet He did not sin* (Hebrews 4:15). In Christ, we find a mighty God who was resurrected and conquered death and the enemy.

This past summer has been one of the roughest times in my life. I will be still working with New Hope Bible Fellowship until May 2020. In the meantime, I’ve been knocking on doors as well for some potential ministries in the future.. Since I see how life-sharing has been a significant element in my ministry, I decided to apply for Resident Director positions at some Christian universities in the US. Unfortunately, all of them rejected me. Most of them require a Master-Degree in Higher Education while mine is a Master-Degree in Intercultural Studies. Apparently my 6 year-experience as a Resident Director at a fellowship home in Indonesia didn’t convince them enough.

At first, to get one door closed shut in my face was fine. I was able to handle it. But after 12 times of rejections from different places, I have to say that my spirit grew fatigued. I found God was silent and hiding His face from me. I asked The Lord if it was too much to ask for a job in which I can serve

effectively. But an answer from the Lord came to me one morning as I was worshipping Him, pouring out my heart singing with my guitar (I ended up writing a new song that morning). The Lord reminded me of His promises and His perfect timing. Out of this experience, I wrote out my July sermon and I had a chance to sing the new song at New Hope. It's really humbling to see my personal story with God touch others.

Let me quote again Parker Palmer from my July sermon, "The deeper our faith, the more doubt we must endure; the deeper our hope, the more prone we are to despair; the deeper our love, the more pain its loss will bring... If we refuse to hold them in hopes of living without doubt, despair, and pain, we also find ourselves living without faith, hope, and love" (A Hidden Wholeness, p.82-83).

So, what is hope? Paul wrote, "*For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently*" (Romans 8:24). Our hope in the world is not anchored in the presents and blessings God gives us, but it's only in His presence alone. Real hope causes us more hunger and thirst for God and at the same time it reorders our deepest yearning of intimacy and beauty towards God himself.

Exercising Hope

I've been living 4 years in Wheaton and I've been noticing normally the Spring semester is a crucial moment when hope is put to the test. Some walk out with a lot of "stitches", some walk out totally drained (like walking zombies to exaggerate the metaphor), and some simply don't make it. I don't mean to discourage everyone when I say this. But this is the reality that we must face. Just like faith and love, hope needs to be practiced day by day otherwise it turns like a weak muscle that can't work optimally due to the lack of exercise.

How do we exercise hope?

Let us return to the Lord... Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth" (Hosea 6:1,3a)

We exercise hope by returning to God every time. To state it more concretely, let me put it this way: when you're happy, come to the Lord; when you're sad, come to the Lord; when you're in despair, come to the Lord; when you're in abundance, come to the Lord; when you're in doubt, come to the Lord; when you're tempted, come to the Lord; when you're anxious, come to the Lord; when you're angry, come to the Lord; when you're confused, come to the Lord; when you're confident, come to the Lord; when you're timid, come to the Lord; when you're with others, come to the Lord, and when you're by yourself come to the Lord. In a nutshell, live in the presence of the Lord every single minute—even at this moment when you're listening to this sermon.

Immanuel in a broken yet beautiful Life

Life is (indeed) broken yet beautiful. Living in this fallen world, brokenness & disappointments are inevitable. There's a good story that I would like to share. It's written by a father who describes his time with his son at a dentist office.

"I didn't expect a profound lesson about the Father's heart at the dentist's office—but I got one. I was there with my ten-year-old son. He had an adult tooth coming in under a baby tooth that hadn't fallen out yet. It had to come out. There was no other way.

My son, in tears, pleaded with me: "Dad, isn't there another way? Can't we just wait and see? Please, Dad, I don't *want* to have this tooth pulled!" It just about broke my heart, but I told him, "Son, it's got to come out. I'm sorry. There's no other way." And I held his hand as he wriggled and writhed while the dentist removed that stubborn molar, tears in my eyes too. I couldn't take his pain away; the best I could offer was to be present with him in it." (Adam Holz, Nov 6, 2018 Our Daily Bread)

We can trust that, in God's time, we will know what He wants us to know. In the meantime, just knowing He's there, Immanuel, God with us, is enough to be strong and courageous, and trust in His provisional hands on our lives.

He Has Done Great Things for Us and We Are Filled with Joy

Though hope seems mostly to have a future dimension (we would normally say, "I hope someday...") yet uniquely it has a present dimension that is empowering us. Real hope opens the gate of thankfulness in the present. In real hope, we know God is in control and working in the present. "*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

That morning when I wrote my song, God led me to see my life in hindsight. I am not left alone. I have community, I have people who care and support me, I have people whom I love and care for. I enjoy the beauty of sunrise and sunset. I feel God's presence in the breeze when I'm riding my bike, and I find comfort in a smile of strangers I run into in the park. Hope brings me deeper to experience the beauty of human relationships and the beauty of nature. With that I know that God has done great things and I am filled with joy.

Song: We Will Feast in the House of Zion By Sandra McCracken

We will not be burned by the fire
He is the LORD our God
We are not consumed, by the flood
Upheld, protected, gathered up

Chorus

In the dark of night, before the dawn
My soul, be not afraid We will feast in the house of
Zion; we will sing with our hearts restored.

He has done great things, we will say together
We will feast and weep no more

For the promised morning, oh how long?
Oh God of Jacob, be my strength

Chorus

Every vow we've broken and betrayed
You are the Faithful one
And from the garden to the grave
Bind us together, bring shalom

Chorus