

“A Theology of Hope”

Mark 10:46-52

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From the Pulpit

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Let us pray: O Ever-present and Ever-near God, we acknowledge Your active and felt presence, here, among us this morning. We ask that You would open our hearts and stir our spirits that we would receive Your Word for us this day. And, O dear God, may the words that I have to offer here, this morning, please You and honor You and glorify Your holy name. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

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I'd like to begin this morning by asking all of **YOU** a question: How are you doing? How are all of **YOU** doing?

As I stand, here, before and with all of you, this morning, I am curious and really *do* want to know how **each** one of you is approaching these **profound** transitional times in our life together – as a congregation.

All of us here, this morning ... every single one of us is holding a lot of **significant** questions in our hearts these days, yes?

Questions like:

- Now that Rev. Tim has retired, what happens, **next**, here, at First Church?
- And what is the process of hiring an **intentional interim senior minister**?
- And, for that matter, when *will* that person start in **that** role?
- And then, how long can we expect until the next **settled pastor** is called?

- And what's this that I hear about seeing Rev. Tim again?
- Will it really be about **three years** or so until he is able to return as a retired pastor and member of First Church?

All of these questions are **really good** questions and **important** questions! And if you haven't attended a Listening Circle yet, I encourage you to do so. Or, of course, you could speak to Sarah Reed or Greg Halbe or any member of our Transition Team – including me! We really **do** want to hear from you **directly!**

And, in addition to all of these questions and concerns and “yet unknowns” about the **immediate** future of the pastoral leadership of our congregation, there are **also** those other “bigger picture” anxieties that come with this fast-approaching and consequential presidential election!

We are all wondering:

- **Who** will be our next President of the United States?
- And will this election really be as “razor-thin close” as the polls indicate?
- And will we actually know the election results *on* November 5 **or** will it take several days, once again, to count all of the anticipated – and record number – of absentee or mail ballots this year?

And then, of course, in addition to all the current unknowns about the future leadership of our nation – *and* our congregation – there are also the everyday worries that we are all holding in our hearts this morning including:

- *perhaps* our own health issues or recent medical diagnoses;
- or the *various* concerns that we have about our family members and church friends and co-workers;
- as well as our neighbors, right here in our city, who continue to struggle due to the lack of affordable housing as well as the prevalence of food deserts throughout Columbus.

PHEW! There is A LOT that is occupying our “brain space” and our “heart space” – these days. Wouldn’t you agree?!

And so, *what DO we do* with all of these worries and concerns and “dangling questions” that we are all holding?

Where do we turn for inspiration and direction and guidance to lead us through these times of significant transition as we hold all of the “unknowns” and the stress and the worries of our lives today?

Well, of course, this morning, in this time of prayerful reflection, we turn our hearts to God who has brought us together as one people – to touch us and speak to us through worship – as we reflect on God’s Word for us this day.

And so as we faithfully step into this *time of transition* – *and* as we turn the page to this new chapter of shared ministry among us – in this season of new beginnings, we find encouragement and assurance *and hope and grounding* in our Gospel reading from Mark 10 for today.

Now, as we reflect on our text for this morning, it is significant – in this healing story – to note that Bartimaeus. had. **hope!**

Bartimaeus (who was blind) had heard that Jesus was in town – there in Jericho – and so, there, by the roadside – *literally there*, on the margins of society – Bartimaeus **courageously** spoke up and spoke out and called out for what he needed.

He shouted out: “Jesus, have mercy on me!”

And how did Jesus respond?

Jesus stopped what he was doing and called out to Bartimaeus and **invited him** to *come closer* to him.

Jesus then asked Bartimaeus directly, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Bartimaeus' reply was clear and concise and specific and he said, "My teacher, let me see again."

And *immediately*, Bartimaeus' sight was restored. And Scripture tells us that he *then* began to follow Jesus "on the way."

While Bartimaeus had been **physically** blind, his *spiritual* vision was intact. You see, Bartimaeus. had. FAITH. And he had HOPE. And he knew what he needed, and he sought it out.

Bartimaeus called out to Jesus and spoke up and spoke out for what was essential for his own healing and health and wholeness.

And Jesus, in his love and grace and mercy and compassion and embrace of *all* people especially the outcast and the marginalized:

saw Bartimaeus,

heard Bartimaeus,

healed Bartimaeus,

and restored not only his physical vision but his faith was affirmed and restored as well.

And, in response, Bartimaeus found HOPE for a new life and became a faithful follower of Jesus.

Our Gospel reading this morning offers us inspiration to live out of a place of HOPE in this season of NEW BEGINNINGS and NEW POSSIBILITIES. It is a story that touches us and teaches us about what is known as a "theology of hope."

As I was reflecting on our text from Mark, recently, I was reminded of *a Liberation Theology* course that I took in seminary several years ago. And, in that course, I was introduced to the writing of Jürgen Moltmann (YERgun MOLTmahn), a German theologian (who, by the way, died earlier this year, in June at the age of 98.).

Moltmann wrote and taught extensively about what has become known as a “Theology of Hope” which was inspired by *his own* personal experiences as a prisoner-of-war during World War II.

That horrific and traumatic and painful *and* yet transformational experience led him to a personal relationship with Jesus in which HOPE for each and every day played a central role in his survival.

And so, for the rest of his life, it was this THEOLOGY of HOPE that shaped his thinking and his teaching and his writing and his influence as a theologian.

At the heart of this theology of hope, is Moltmann’s belief that God’s promise to work in the future is **more important** than what God has done in the past.

And so, Moltmann’s theology of hope insists, then, *that* as followers of Jesus, we are **all** called to become active participants in the world around us as we become co-creators *with* God and with one another in order to bring about a more just and hope-filled world for *all* people.

A theology of hope is, indeed, a **faithful** and an **active** expression of our Christian faith.

And so, *a theology of hope* doesn’t allow us to sit back and be passive.

Rather, it invites us and engages us and even insists that we turn toward one another and share:

- our hopes and our prayers,
- our ideas and our dreams,
- our time and our talents,
- our passions and our commitment,
- our gifts and our graces,
- and our love and our compassion for all our neighbors.

And so, it is in this new season, this new chapter of our life together – that we come together – to work together – and to build up the Body of Christ together, here, in and through First Church – and in the world around us.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.