Hope: Count On It June 28, 2020 Gaylord First UCC

Some of you might remember when a copper mine in Copiapo, Chile collapsed on August 5, 2010 trapping 33 Chilean miners. The miners were trapped under 700,000 tons of rock a half mile below the surface of the Earth

for 69 days. Their rescue on October 13 of that year was telecast worldwide. And the whole world, including

me and probably many of you, watched mesmerized at what is now called “a miracle”.

For nearly 17 days after the mine first collapsed, the fate of the men was unknown. But, Chilean officials continued to search for the miners and to send probes down through the rock to check for signs of life. But, after

so much time, the families of those miners surely had to believe that their loved ones were dead. Even as they gathered for vigil after vigil at the site of the mine-collapse, in what became known as Camp Esperanza, the Spanish word for hope, they had to at least consider the possibility that they might never see the miners again.

Imagine the joy they must have had when the message came through that the miners were, indeed, alive. Some likened it to the biblical story of Lazarus. Surely the families of these miners must have felt the same kind of joy that Mary and Martha felt when Jesus raised their brother, Lazarus, from the dead.

The word “hope” was used over and over again on October 13, 2010 as each of the miners was methodically raised from the depths of the underground cave that had become their home for over two months. And as each man was released from the capsule, his story was shared with the world.

Many of the miners voiced their belief that hope had been a constant for them. Mario Sepulveda, the second miner rescued said, “At no time did I doubt that God would get me out” and then emphasized the importance of cherishing family members.

The wife of Mario Gomez told reporters that she never lost hope that her husband and the other miners would be rescued. “No”, she said, “we all had faith and hope.” And when her husband, who was the oldest of all the miners, was released from the capsule that had carried him to the earth’s surface, he hugged his wife and then dropped to his knees and thanked God.

In a note to his wife just before the rescue mission began, Jimmy Sanchez, the youngest miner, wrote, “There were actually 34 of us because God never left us down here.” Quite a testament about his faith in God and his hope in God’s plan for him!

Story after story emerged with each miner … each one referring in one way or another to the fact that their faith and hope had sustained them through their ordeal. The thirty-third and last miner, Luis Urzua, who had also been the group leader during the entombment, answered a reporter’s question, “How did you survive?” with these words, “Faith, hope and family.”

I’m guessing that the 23rd Psalm was recited by those miners more than just a few times during their ordeal. This Psalm tends to be the scripture that many people turn to when they are going through dark, uncertain times in their lives. Where do you turn during struggles or adversities in your life? What comforts you? For many, Psalm 23 is their “go to” scripture.

The emphasis of the Psalm is that God is with us when we walk through any dark valley in our lives. He’s got us, He’s holding us when we’re suffering, or in pain, or struggling, and He will lead us to those “green meadows and peaceful waters” if we follow Him and are obedient to Him. God is our hope in the darkest times of our lives.

In the book of 2 Corinthians, **that** was also the message that Paul was sending to the Church of Corinth. In passages from chapters 1 and 4, Paul urged the new Christians to be **faith prepared** so that when they fall upon adversity, when they are struggling … they would know with confidence that God is with them. And we, too should know, without a doubt, that God with us, too. As Paul said … “our present troubles are quite small and won’t last long. Yet they produce immeasurable great glory that will last forever!”

The traditional hymn “My Hope Is Built” was written by Edward Mote in 1834. Edward Mote, by the way, came from a family that didn’t allow a Bible in their home. Still, in spite of that, when he was a teenager, he gave his life to the Lord and later, at the age of 55, he became a minister.

The hymn he wrote compliments Paul’s letter to the Church in Corinth. The chorus of the hymn, which you might be familiar with, is:

“On Christ the solid rock I stand,

All other ground is sinking sand.”

The message of the hymn is this: if we are secure in our relationship with God, if we have a solid foundation, … then we can look at the adversities … the trials and suffering in our lives as opportunities to grow in our faith and to have a closer relationship with God. Not that we should wish for adversities or struggles … but when they come our way, we need to be prepared to lean on God and to believe in the hope that God gives us.

In his sermon series called Finding Hope, Adam Hamilton, the senior pastor at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, defines hope as “the conviction that the future will in some meaningful way be better than the present.” That he says is the message of hope that we see in the book of Revelation, written, of course by the Apostle John while he was on the island of Patmos.

But, let me repeat … Pastor Hamilton defines **hope** as “the conviction (or belief) that the future will be better than the present. The scripture reading from Revelation today included John’s words of hope for who doesn’t think of these words as words of hope, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, no more mourning, no more crying or pain because all the old ways are gone.”

Some Christians find the Book of Revelation frightening and hard to understand … but what John intended was to send the seven churches of Asia words of encouragement and support and to give them hope for the future. He wrote the Book of Revelation in what is called the “apocalyptic” form, which a type of Jewish literature that uses symbolic imagery, and that is what I think confuses and frightens us.

John’s purpose in writing Revelation was to communicate hope in the ultimate triumph of God to those who were disillusioned and who were being persecuted at the time it was written … sometime between 69 and 96 AD.

The message of hope … that “God will wipe away every tear, no more death or mourning, or crying or pain”. That was a powerful message to people during a time of disorientation when it was written … and, really, a powerful message for us today … a message we so desperately need to hear, too.

Revelation reminds us that God will have the final word … not evil, not suffering, not disease … God … will triumph and have the final word. In the meantime, Pastor Hamilton says, our job as Christians is to embody the hope Revelation shows us. We need to be hope **incarnate**. That is, we need to do more than say words of “hope” to people … we need to embody it, to be hope in the flesh to others.

To explain further, he tells a story about when his daughter was very young. One night she entered her parents’ bedroom, crying and saying she was scared. Pastor Hamilton told her not to worry that God was watching over her and would keep her safe. Her response was, “But, I need someone with skin!”

And … that is what we all need from time to time … to see hope “with skin” or in-the-flesh … in other words, hope incarnate.

We’ve had the opportunity to see hope embodied through the recent events in our country. During the past few months that we have all struggled through the pandemic, we’ve seen a lot of examples of hope incarnate … in the front line workers – from health care workers who refused to stay home when they were needed to care for the sick … to the people who work in grocery stores so that we can have the necessities we need. From the food banks that provided food for families who had lost their income … to the schools that provided meals for students who might otherwise go without. From children who write letters to brighten the day of a shut-in … to the planned drive-by parades at nursing homes. I’m sure you can add to the list.

Pastor Hamilton wrote a book several years ago entitled *Why? Making Sense of God’s Will* … it was one of our Bible Studies a few years ago. In this book, he wrote, “It is the hope that God is with us all the time. It’s the hope that God works through us to help others and through others to help us. And ultimately it is the hope that the day will come when there will be a new Jerusalem where **God’s will** ultimately triumphs. This hope sustains us.”

He ends the book by saying that people often ask him if he really believes in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, if he really believes that **good** will triumph over evil, and they ask if he believes that God’s plans will ultimately prevail? He replies with these words, “I not only believe it, I am counting on it.” And he invites us to count on it, too.

We **will** have adversities in this life, and they **will** bring us opportunities to grow in our faith and to develop a closer, more meaningful relationship with God. But, if you’re on **solid ground** with God and if you are **faith prepared**, you **will** enjoy that “immeasurable great glory in heaven” that Paul spoke about. And the hope that Pastor Hamilton says we should count on … will come to be.

God gives us hope … it’s one of His greatest gifts to us … and He has promised that He will walk **with us** through the storms in our lives … he will hold us in the palm of his hands or carry us on his back, if necessary … but, we will not be alone. He will be with us. Just like that young Chilean minor said, “There were actually 34 of us because God never left us down here.”

My guess is that some of those miners struggled with their faith during their long ordeal, especially during the first days when a rescue must have seemed hopeless… and that those struggles eventually taught them a lot about faith and hope.

And my guess that they learned several lessons during their ordeal, lessons of hope… that God gives comfort …and that God never leaves us in the storms of our lives.

Those 33 men are walking, talking examples of hope incarnate.

May we all strive to be hope incarnate for others … to do our job as Christians in the here and now and embody hope to others.

Amen