

Scriptures:
Jeremiah 29: 10-14
Romans 8: 18-28
Luke 3:18-19

Tree of Hope and Faith

Hope and faith, hope and faith, hope and faith that is all I am living with right now it would seem. I hope that one day the way things are will change, I hope that we all remain healthy, I hope that I am doing the right things for my family and my children right now, I hope and I have faith that God is far ahead of me, I have faith that the systems that we are following like the government and the school board are doing the best they know how right now. I have faith that God is leading the way for Squamish United Church and that God desires to see us thrive. I hope that we are hearing God's voice and following holy direction.

I trust in scripture and in the prophets and leaders that have gone before me that tell me "For surely God knows the plans God has for us, plans for our welfare and not for harm, to give us a future with hope. I have to live in hope because I have never heard my spirit groan so loudly for so long and I have never seen, heard and felt creation groan so deeply. That is why I wanted us to spend a few weeks considering what a future with hope can look like.

This series was sparked by an image I saw of a sketch of a tree and within its roots was the word HOPE. It brought me back to the focus scripture we used for the season when we were discerning the building of Centrepont. We imagined our mustard seed of faith being planted and growing into a tree where people from all over our community can come for rest, and shelter, and restoration, and growth. A place to rediscover hope and faith. This seed of faith would be planted and its roots would expand so far and wide that it would touch our whole community. I see this image in my mind over and over. I pray over this image. This image gives me hope and as we move into a new season as a church I believe that God is ahead of us, I believe that even though we may not be able to see it the spirit is way ahead of us.

"For surely I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." — Jeremiah 29:11

This powerful and affirming passage is a part of a letter Jeremiah writes to the exiles in Babylon -- the Hebrews who have been taken from their own land and are now living in a foreign place. Some of their leaders are focusing on the shock of the situation, and agonizing over what might lie ahead, and how they can get back to their old places. Jeremiah sees it differently, and his advice is radically at odds with what others are saying.

Jeremiah's advice is, in essence, to fully embrace the new situation. Stop wailing and bemoaning, and set about making a life. "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce.

...; multiply there, and do not decrease" (Jeremiah 29:5-6). God is with them wherever they are, the prophet insists, and God can do a great work through them in Babylon.

"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

We so often find ourselves wishing we were some place else -- in a different physical location, or in consciousness, or in terms of health or abundance. In 2020 we wish we could travel somewhere we cannot, and be with people we cant, we wish so much was different. We spend time and waste energy trying to figure out how to get back to where we were. The truth is God is with us, present within us, no matter where we are even in 2020. And there is a great potential for good -- for future and hope—wherever we are. What if we were to stop and go into our hearts, and embrace the Christ Presence we find there, and ask that God be revealed exactly where we are, so that we can create wonderful good in the moment, yes even in 2020. And when the time comes to move elsewhere, to come back together, to open up our lives and the world more, God will show us the way.

It was as I started to think about planting in our hearts and minds a hope for the future that Louise brought us back to the sacred garden. This garden has been beautiful this year. We have spend time taking photos in it and meditating in it and Louise and a few others have spent time planting and weeding and caring for it. It was as I thought about this series I received an email asking if we could ask people to plant bulbs in our garden that will surprise us in the spring and I thought. THATS IT - that is exactly what hope for the future looks like.

It is time to be harbingers of hope. I recall a story I once read of a woman who was in her final stages of cancer one fall. She went out to the garden and she planted daffodil bulbs so that her family would have a fond beautiful memory of life and hope the next spring. When I tried to look up this story I discovered there are now hundreds like it. That is what planting is isn't it? It is hope and faith. It is putting a seed or a bulb in the ground hoping it will one day spring forth in beauty and abundance. In the next weeks I invite you to come and plant bulbs in our garden or your garden wherever you are so that next spring when we are potentially back in our sanctuary together we too will remember that new life and possibility and hope comes out of even the most difficult of seasons.

In a time when hope is needed so desperately by so many of us I think it is good to be reminded that not everything is a "quick fix" and patience is sometimes needed. We plant the seeds for a "Future with Hope" and wait in the knowledge that God is always present. If ever there was a time when I felt like I was having to live with God's timing it was now. Of course I have had those times in my life before but it feels like the whole world is in it anew. We always know we are on God's time but now it is so clear we are not in control and we have to trust and live in hope and faith. We all thought we would worship this way for a little while, but we are in it for an even longer hall. Most of us thought (except those who didn't who are now saying - we told you so) that we as a congregation would get financially back on our feet but unfortunately some

thought we would do it by doing the same thing we always did but that never works does it. What is exciting though is now God is taking us to a new vision, a new way of being, a new dream, a new creation. God is stretching our imaginations and we are doing all of this in God's time. Once again we are reminded of how important it is to shift from immediate gratification to the discipline of dreaming and building for future generations, while we follow the flow of the spirit so that all creation may live the life abundant.

With a mustard seed of faith we are building a place where our neighbours are receiving hope, and shelter, and care. Our roots are spreading wider and I can't wait to see how our tree of faith and hope grows.

Thanks be to God
Amen.

