

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
March 14 & 15, 2015
John Crosby
Hope Together
2 Samuel 23:8-23**

[Video: John Crosby and Skip Nelson.]

[JC:] I got to know you and Susan through getting ready to do your wedding. You guys look like a great couple, got the world by the tail, and as with a lot of us, that's partly true. Then as you go through life, you can still look that way, but some of the things under the surface make a much tougher life. I know you've had some tough times in the last couple of years. I just wonder if we could get the truth when I say, how's it going? What would some of the things be that I'd hear you have struggled with in the last couple of years? How have they affected you?

[SN:] Well, I've always been kind of a glass-half-full guy and there have been times over the past few years when I'm wondering, like, where's the glass? I started a business out of college and that was my professional life. I put everything I had into it and we built it up. Had some good success and then the economy hit in 2009-10 and it really hit us hard. We tried to make it work, put everything we had into it, and it didn't. And as an optimistic guy, I always thought, this is my business. This is my professional life. This is my retirement. This is me. This is what I built. Coming to the realization that it didn't work and we were going to have to shut it down was devastating.

[JC:] What are some of the thoughts that come, that you might know are not true, but that come when you lose hope? What are some of the things that you think, "I know it's not true, but this is what I'm feeling"?

[SN:] Oh, yeah. At some point, it's like, am I being punished for something? I mean, I've tried to be good. I've tried to be a good Christian. I've tried to be a good man. I've tried to make good decisions and what the heck? I mean, why am I being what feels like punished at almost every level? And that I know isn't true and to compound that, where's God? I've tried to be a good Christian and do the right things. I pray and I ask and I try to walk as God would want me to walk and where is He in all this? It's like it doesn't even matter. And again, I know that's not true, but that's where I go, and then in a kind of compounded thinking, where's my faith? Why am I not a better Christian? I shouldn't be having those doubts. I should know God's there and that God's got a plan and it's a better plan than I can think and blah-blah-blah, you know, all that. But going through it, I didn't think that and sometimes I still struggle, like, what's the end game here? Why are we going through this? I know there's a reason. Sometimes Susan and I joke, it would be nice to get the memo as to what that is, but we don't get the memo. The thing that is really unfortunate in life is that I've found that through the most difficult times are when I

notice God's faithfulness the most. I really wish that weren't true. I wish the good times would just reinforce God's will for me, but that hasn't been what I've found. What I've found is that where I *really* see God is when things are bad. When you lose a parent, when there are financial issues, whatever it might be, if we're open to it, that's where we can really see God. And where that has really shown itself to me has been at CPC.

[JC:] You guys were in on the beginning of what we call Catalyst, a group of young adults. How has that evolved?

[SN:] The warmth and the love that we've felt at CPC and in Catalyst have been unlike anything I've ever experienced in my life. It has been such a support and such a realization of God and God's love. Even when I didn't feel it with God, I've felt it with my community at CPC. When we've gotten into a group like Catalyst, where you can kind of get to know people beyond the "Hi, how're you doing?" "Fine" level, it's not, do you have issues? It's *what* are your issues? Right? Everybody's got challenges, not just us. Everybody's got challenges, health issues, financial issues, whatever it might be. The CPC community has given me the freedom to feel vulnerable and that has been very freeing to me. And in doing so, I've found it's helped me feel more secure and stronger in my faith. It isn't weakness. It has really turned out to provide strength to me.

[Video ends. To view, see link below]

I think Skip is great. One of you should give him a job. I love that "I'm a glass-half-full guy and I'm going, where's the glass?" and the reality that for all of us who have hard times, it brings out the power of community. When we feel alone and isolated, despair crouches at the door. When we are surrounded by a community that we don't have to pretend with, life can not only endure, but we can thrive.

One of the reasons I love this book, *The Hope Quotient*, is that Ray Johnson recognizes the power of hope that comes from friendships. He says, "Show me your friends and I'll show you your future." It's true in small lives and in big ones. This is the second anniversary of a new Roman Catholic Pope, Pope Francis, and in an interview, he was asked about some of the changes that have happened since he assumed the papacy. Somebody said, "What's been the most surprising difficulty about being Pope?" and he didn't talk about scandal or bureaucracy or language. He said the hardest thing has been "to lose all my friends." Popes don't have friends. He said, "I used to be surrounded by friends." To be isolated, set apart, is hard and dangerous spiritually. We think of a king, like King David in the Bible, not needing friends because they've got subjects, but long before David had subjects, he had friends and there would not have been one without the other. His friends formed the core of people who believed in him first and hid with him in the desert, who became part of an army that God used. This is the way the story starts.

¹⁰ These are the leaders of David's mighty warriors. Together with all Israel, they decided to make David their king, just as the LORD had promised

One time all the Israelites ran away in battle

¹⁴ but Eleazar and David held their ground in the middle of the field and beat back the Philistines.

¹⁵ Once when David was at the rock near the cave of Adullam,

which is like a suburb of Bethlehem and Bethlehem is a suburb of Jerusalem,

¹⁶ David was staying in the stronghold at the time, and a Philistine detachment had occupied the town of Bethlehem. ¹⁷ David remarked longingly to his men, “Oh, how I would love some of that good water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem.” ¹⁸ So the Three [captains] broke through the Philistine lines, drew some water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem, and brought it back to David. But David refused to drink it. Instead, he poured it out as an offering to the LORD. ¹⁹ “God forbid that I should drink this!” he exclaimed. “This water is as precious as the blood of these men who risked their lives to bring it to me.” [1st Chronicles 11:10-19]

Do you have friends like that? Don't you wish you had friends like that? How do you get friends like that who will bring water when you're low and courage when you're afraid and forgiveness when you've messed up, who often do not have an answer, but make sure that you know that you're not alone? This story says that David was near the cave of Adullam. That's out in the wilderness. Here's how David got there. Samuel tells the story that the first king of Israel, King Saul, goes literally crazy. He becomes insanely jealous and takes it out on the shepherd boy David.

¹⁰ That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath.

Achish is the enemy king.

¹² David . . . was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath. ¹³ So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard. ¹⁴ Achish said to his servants, “Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me?” [1st Samuel 21:10-14]

¹ David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. ² All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their commander. About four hundred men were with him [1st Samuel 22:1-2].

Friends look a lot different at the end of the story than they do at the beginning. At the end of the story, they are David's mighty warriors, famous. At the beginning, they are convicts running away in fear. Friends look different at the end of the story than they do at the start, or maybe it's another case of “Show me your friends and I'll show you your future.” One affects the other. I believe that one of God's primary desires is to establish relationships, communities where hope can flourish, where darkness gets pushed away. God replenishes the world after the flood with Noah and a family that grows to a tribe. God promises to give descendants to Abraham and that the new community will be as numerous as the grains of sand on the beach. God says, “I will bless the entire earth through your people.” Jesus picks 12 ordinary men to just walk with Him and live with him and He founds a new community that even the gates of Hell will not stop. The end of the story of God is in the Book of Revelation where in chapter 21, it says,

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth

²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God

People there filled the streets with song and joy and love and there was no more fear. Real community. And, of course, if that's the desire of God, then the desire of the Evil One is to do exactly the opposite. One of the words for the Devil in the Old Testament is *Shaitan*. It means *the splitter*. "I want to split you off from God and isolate you. I want to split you off from the people who love you and make you feel alone." Community is not easy. Community can be turned into a place of arrogance and masks, a club where everybody who comes in here all agrees. We all know the same songs, we all wear the same clothes, and we keep everybody else out. God wants to teach us the kind of community that fills lives with hope. He wants you to learn how to love one another even if you think it's past that season of your life. He wants you to become people of hope. What would that community look like in your life?

I guess I'd like to stop and ask you to close your eyes a minute and answer this question. "When I think of people who love me and help me know God better, when I think of people who are close to me and love me like I hope God does, who comes to mind?" I want to encourage that community, and if there wasn't somebody who sprang to mind, I want to stir up in you that need. Community is right in the middle of the life of Jesus. Look how Jesus talks about community. It's a series of phrases He uses called *one another*. "Outdo *one another* in showing honor, comfort *one another*, agree with *one another*, live in peace with *one another*, serve *one another*, be kind to *one another*, forgive *one another*, love *one another*." That's real community. I'm still learning about it. I'm still trying to learn how to be the hope-filled leader, the hope-filled man that I think God wants me to be, and it's tied to the kinds of friends that bring hope to my life. It's tied to becoming the kind of friend who gives God's hope to someone else.

The first thing I've learned from this story about that kind of friendship is that **David is joined by other people, not when he's strong, but when he's weak**. You need community all the time, but especially when you're weak. It says in the text that "all those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him." Christianity is not the all-star team. You are not supposed to surround yourself with the best and the brightest and the ones that you love the easiest. God seems to draw together the unlikely. The apostle Paul wrote a letter, it wasn't even to a church, it was to a house in Corinth and he wanted to remind them of the start.

²⁶Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong [1st Corinthians 1:26-27].

Paul called into community the weak so that God could give them hope. I thought of this when I found a card that I send to a friend that said, "A good friend will bail you out of jail, but a best friend will be in the cell next to you saying, 'I told you to run faster.'" The gift of community is when you have people who know you and they love you anyway. You don't have to fake it. The gift of God's community is what is called *unveiled faces*. It says at the end of our struggle, we will all be with unveiled faces, reflecting the glory of God.

¹⁸ We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit [2nd Corinthians 3:18].

Together we will reflect the glory of God. That comes from the Old Testament, from the time when Moses is up on top of the mountain all by himself and sees God and the glory of God fills his life so much that, literally, his face glows like it's a mirror. It glows. He comes back down the mountain and he scares the people because his face is glowing. "He's been with God. He'll kill us." And to help the people, he puts a veil over his face so that he can become approachable again. That's the good part of the story. The bad part of the story is that the glow goes away, but Moses keeps on the veil so people won't know he's become just an ordinary person again. You and I are called to live with *unveiled faces*. You need a community or a person where you can let your guard down whether you are 13 or 83. Who is that person in your life? Many of you are blessed with a spouse. It needs to be beyond that.

The second thing I've been learning about this idea of community is that **community gives courage and hope you don't find when you are alone**. It says in the story that all the Israelites ran away, but David and Eleazar stood back-to-back and turned the tide. David does not go and get the water because he is alone and is afraid, but a group of them go and do what one cannot. We need people to have our backs.

A couple of years ago we were going through just one of those times here at CPC. I can't even remember if it was the denomination or politics or what, but I shared that I was feeling—like, "Wow! Am I the only one in this?" As I left, one of my friends gave me a hug and when I got home, I felt something in my pocket. It was a note. I opened it and it said, "John, I love you, brother and I've got your back." And I wasn't alone anymore. Now he's crazy, so I may have been crazy, too, but I wasn't alone. I had somebody who was with me and we were back-to-back. Community is finding someone you can be back-to-back with so you can then become face-to-face because real friends, comrades in battle, tell the truth when nobody else will.

David needs people when he becomes king because when you're on top, nobody will tell you the truth. They will talk about the truth with everybody else, but not with you. David's friend Nathan is the only one who says, "You're the one who had the affair and killed the guy and that's why God is coming after us." Oscar Wilde said, "I'm used to people stabbing me in the back, but true friends stab you in the heart." They come right up to us and speak the truth when no one else will. If only we will open up to those people. Are you in the kind of relationships or the kind of community that will be back-to-back with you? "I've got your back and because I've got your back, I'll tell you the truth that others are afraid to tell you."

God has made us for community. The third thing I'm learning is that **I believe friends are transformed by their fellowship**. Bob Goff wrote a book several years ago called *Love Does*. Love doesn't just feel. Love doesn't think. Love doesn't talk. Love acts! Love does! Whether it is getting water for a guy who is suffering from thirst or getting arrested together or sitting at the bedside of somebody who has just lost their little baby girl or walking into the house when you don't know what to say but this newly retired person has cancer. When we are together acting, God does amazing things.

Sometimes you can't see that until afterwards and it's pointed out. The best talk on leadership I ever heard is almost 600 years old. I've heard it so much I've just about got it memorized. It's

Shakespeare's recollection of the Battle of Agincourt. Some of you may remember hearing about this famous history-turning battle in the Hundred Years' War in Europe. France and England are fighting. The English have a young king. They have fought their way up the coast of France but they are now outnumbered by the French army five-to-one and they are exhausted from the other battles. "This is the time for us to be smart and regroup," and that's where Shakespeare picks it up. The Duke of Westmoreland is talking to his fellow officers and he says, "Does the king know the odds? They outnumber us five-to-one". And he said,

Oh, that we now had here
But one ten thousand of those men in England
That do no work today.

And then King Henry steps out on the stage and says,

What's he that wishes so?
My cousin Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin.
If we are marked to die, we are enough
To do our country loss; and if to live,
The fewer men, the greater share of honor.
God's will, I pray thee wish not one man more

Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host,
That he which hath no stomach to this fight,
Let him depart. His passport shall be made,
And crowns for convoy put into his purse.
We would not die in that man's company
That fears his fellowship to die with us.

And this is the famous part.

This day is called the feast of Crispian*.
He that outlives this day and comes safe home
Will stand a-tiptoe when the day is named
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
He that shall see this day, and live old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors
And say, "Tomorrow is Saint Crispian."
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,
And say, "These wounds I had on Crispin's day."
Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot
But he'll remember with advantages
What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,
Familiar in his mouth as household words,
Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,
Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered.
This story shall the good man teach his son,
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,

But we in it shall be remembered—
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition;
And gentlemen in England now abed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

You hear that all through history, “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.” We should not confuse community for God. They are not the same, but community is a group of people that bring us *to* God. I'd ask you to look at your relational world today. Is it giving you faith? Is it giving you hope? Is it showing you love? I believe that community is the primary tool that keeps us focusing outward on our mission. God wants to use communities, not individuals, communities messy and broken as we are to draw others into His story, to introduce them to Jesus the Redeemer. They don't believe it when they hear it. They believe it when they see it. Let's break through the enemy lines together and bring the hope of living water to a thirsty world.

Would you join me in a time of silence? Think about those relationships. If you are blessed to have them, have you told them lately? If relationship is hard for you or you feel on the outside looking in, can you pray right now that God would draw you into the hard work of loving others that you might love God? And that together as a community of sisters and brothers that we might share hope, hope that does not disappoint because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us. Not to me, not to you, but to *us*! Bless us, Lord God. In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Saints Crispin and Crispinian are twin brothers. The feast day of Saints Crispin and Crispinian is celebrated on October 25. In Shakespeare, Crispinian's name is spelled Crispian, which likely conformed to Elizabethan pronunciation and also to fit Shakespeare's iambic pentameter form.

Link to video shown during this service: <http://www.cpconline.org/index.php?content=videos>
(Skip Nelson's Story)

A postscript from John Crosby:

"I'm encouraging our congregation to get and read The Hope Quotient by Ray Johnston (available in our bookstore). The overarching theme of the series and many of the illustrations are found in there; solo deo Gloria!"

