

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
April 4 & 5, 2015  
John Crosby  
Hope Resurrected  
Acts 23:6, 24:15; 1 Peter 1:3**

The choir just sang the history of the world in three stanzas—from its beginning to its new beginning again. For the rest of us, the world just flies by. Everything changes. Everything disappears. How many of you have twisted and turned to know whether you should buy an 8-track tape or a cassette and that choice lasted about 10 years? For those of you who are past the Stone Age, the same could be said about the millions of you who invested in Myspace and kids are going, “What’s Myspace?” Facebook is already on the way out. The world goes so fast. What will last? The apostle Paul says that only three things will last. In the end, the only things left standing will be faith and hope and love, the most important ingredients to life, without which life has no value.

All winter long, all this Lenten season, we’ve been looking at the middle one of those, hope, asking, what would hope look like and how does it change our lives? Listen to the hope of the Easter followers. Peter runs to the grave and sees nothing and then he says later,

<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you . . . [1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:3-4]

A living hope. That’s the common faith of the early church and it brings hope. It sounds so good. But what happens when that new religion, that new path, hope, runs into real life? I’ve been thinking all this week about Ernest and Anika Robinson. They live out west. For years they prayed for a baby with no luck, if that’s what you call it. They prayed for a baby and then they became pregnant with little Matt. Little Matt was born, but life took a different path. He was born blind and was expected to only live for hours. He never left the wheelchair. He never learned more than three or four words. This was not the life for him or for themselves that they had expected. How do you go on when there is no hope that things will change? I want to keep one eye on the Robinsons even this Easter.

Last week we heard G. K. Chesterton talk about what the experience of the early church would be like. Chesterton said, “Jesus promised His disciples three things—that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy, and in constant trouble.” The Robinsons learned about constant trouble. Maybe you have as well. Here is the common experience of people who believe in hope but live in the real world. “I want to believe in hope but I live in and of the world.” Listen to the apostle Paul. He uses almost the same words as Peter, but he lives it right in the press of real life. It says, “Then Paul called out to the Jews,

<sup>6</sup> . . . “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope

there it is again, hope,

of the resurrection of the dead.”<sup>7</sup> When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.<sup>8</sup> (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.) [Acts 23:6-8]

They began to bitterly fight with each other. “If you believe this life is all that there is, you have chosen a completely different path.” And the fight did not end until Paul was put in prison to later stand trial. When they put him on trial, the same exact things happened. Paul says,

<sup>14</sup> “But I will tell you this: I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which these Jews say is not the right way, and I believe everything that is taught in the Law of Moses and all that is written in the books of the prophets.<sup>15</sup> I have the same hope in God that these Jews have—the hope that all people, good and bad, will be raised from death [Acts 24:14-15].

Then another fight breaks out and Paul is put back in prison. This is what Jesus promised, we would be “completely fearless” about what we believe, “absurdly happy” in the worst of times, “and in constant trouble,” the common experience of the followers of God since the resurrection. All through Lent, all this long, long, long winter, we’ve been trying to describe what hope would look like in the middle of constant trouble.

I should have known that my wife would find the key. Laura told me just this week that she had found hope and that you could actually buy it in a jar and that it was on sale. “Hope in a Jar”, original formula, for all skin types. There is no hope for my skin type. You cannot buy hope in a jar. You have to find out what hope is not. Hope is not American self-reliance. We do cartoons about that. “You can do it if you just try hard enough.” Hope depends on help from the outside. In the same way, hope is not an emotion or optimism—that Rockwell painting of an increasingly better American life for all of us—because feelings come and go and life does not always get better. There is evil and brokenness in the world. The last thing that we learned about what hope is not is that hope is not karma. Most of us believe in karma. If I do good things, good will happen to me. If I do bad things, if I knock over the dominoes, they are going to hit me in the head. But hope is not karma.

We believe that hope is a gift, a gift of endurance. Hope is a gift so we can focus on the finish line, regardless of the circumstances. Regardless of how the race is going now, hope gives us the ability to say, “It will be different *then*.” In a room this full, that is important because in a room on Easter morning, we run the gamut from hope-filled to hope-less, from dreams to despair. Are you experiencing hope this morning or are you looking for it?

It’s stunning, but before I finish this sentence, four crimes will be reported in the United States, perhaps even affecting you. Every four seconds a crime is reported. Before I finish this sentence, another American job will be created and one of you will go from jobless to hopeful. Before I finish this sentence, this very sentence, someone in the United States will have attempted suicide. Every 13 seconds someone tries to take their life. By the time this sermon is over, someone will have succeeded. By the time I finish this sentence, two babies will have been born, one every seven seconds. There’s an OB sitting right over here, hoping the buzzer

doesn't go off to, literally, run out to deliver another baby. Before I finish this sentence, and probably by now, you should be saying, "Oh, don't finish the sentence. That will change everything." Life is a yo-yo, filled with the best and worst on the merry-go-round and it affects us, that up-and-down. Never in human history have so many had so much for so long and been so depressed about what they don't have. We worry about the economy, about relationships, about health, about death, about aging, and all of it sucks out hope. We have a hopeful morning and a terrible week. Then, I don't know if you have experienced this, sometimes when we get what we hope for, it's not what we hoped for. It doesn't make everything all better. What do you expect from hope? How do you explain the hope that you have?

When Laura and I return from trips to the developing world and go to sit in Starbucks, it doesn't take long to see that we live in a society with far too many expectations and far too little hope. We expect a lot. We expect to get what we deserve because we work hard for it. We should get it. We expect to be comfortable, not rich but comfortable. We expect to get good health care. We expect justice for all. We expect, but we do not have, great hopes for the future of our world as a people. When society loses its great hopes, people squander their days because they feel like nothing better is coming so we *over* spend as a people and we *under* love. We *over* argue. We *under* apologize. We lose dreams that make sacrifice worthy, and we grab as much as we can get.

The president of Princeton is Craig Barnes. Craig says Jesus is dying to bring you hope. We remember this week Jesus is literally dying to bring hope to this whole part of the world, but He doesn't just bring it to your little life or mine. He expects cosmic things to happen. The apostle Paul explains it like this. He says,

<sup>12</sup> remember that at that time you were separate from Christ . . . without hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ [Ephesians 2:12-13].

That's the core of the Gospel right there. The one who raised Christ will raise us so grace will touch more and more. Don't lose heart. Don't lose hope. The power of God to raise the dead is not only for Jesus, but for us. Some of us have the privilege of walking with you through the valley of the shadow of death, those terrifying, hard, deep seasons of life. And as I have walked with many of you, I find that most of us lose interest in explanations. Explanations don't really help the pain go away. When you are really suffering, what you want most of all is not an explanation, what you want most of all is hope. Hope! The church must become clear that a great hope has entered our world. Something better is coming. His name is Jesus of Nazareth. This hope will not be easy to contain because it is not what you expected and we cannot control it like we want to control everything else, but *this* hope will stay closer than our hearts and lead us out of ourselves and send us out into a world dying for hope.

Hope is the belief that something better is coming. Palm Sunday is the day that hope rides into town and Good Friday is the day that hope dies, but Easter says hope is here to stay. Hope can be here to stay. Hope wants to stay, no matter what. Easter hope says that no matter what, hope will stay.

You know, I don't think many lives can be summarized in one picture, but that little boy born too tough who died too soon, his name was Matthew Stanford Robinson. I think his life can be summed up in one picture, a gift from his father. [Slide shown.] His father watched him live all of

ten years surrounded by love and joy and a mom and a dad who believed in the hope that something better is coming. The risen Christ does not come back from the dead alone.

From the outside the Christian story doesn't appear very hopeful. We often obscure the story with rules, and it's not what we expect, this Christian story. We say the three most hopeful places on Planet Earth are a graveyard and an execution site and a cattle stall, where a homeless kid is being born. The emblem of our faith is not the dollar bill. The emblem of our faith is an empty cross. How is that hopeful? The cross tells the truth about the depth of pain and joy, of suffering and loneliness, about love and guilt in our world. Our hope is built on nothing less than a God who did not have to suffer, but did. Hope comes from knowing Him, knowing Christ *this* side of the grave. Do you know Him? Not, do you know about Him. Not, do you believe in Him, but do you *know* Him? Do you speak to Him, asking Him to answer? Do you have hope from knowing Christ, because life, as I said at the beginning, keeps changing?

A year ago many of us felt on pretty solid ground, but now circumstances are where we would never have predicted. A lot of people feel anxious. They have pressures they never had before. We regret decisions we made just in this last year. We wonder where things will be a year from now. Nobody ever, ever wants hard times to come, but when they do, they have a way of making you ask, what do I expect? Where will my hope come from? Am I building my life on hope that is solid enough so that circumstances beyond my control will not take it away? That's why we are here. Easter is a time to gather. We gather together to remember the only hope capable of sustaining human life through all of its ups and downs. People have not gathered for 2,000 years and said, "The stock market has risen. It has risen indeed." No one rises the day after Easter and says, "Unemployment is down. It is down indeed." "The dollar is up. It is up indeed." "My 401K is good. It is good indeed." Those things will be gone in a flash. Our only hope held by human beings across every continent and age for 2,000 years of difficult and wonderful times, in poverty and wealth, joy and sorrow, disease and healing, life and death itself, our only rallying cry that brings us hope is Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

Christ is risen!

[All:] He is risen indeed!

Lord Jesus, let me believe that. More, let me experience that in the face of despair and of life in the midst of mediocrity. Let those who are dying hear it and not despair. Let those who are young hear it and follow You to life. Let all of us say it to one another that our only hope in life or death is the risen Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*