

Romans 5:1-5
Hope in Suffering
WRCoB 3.12.23

The following story is loosely based on one
By the well-known late Fred Craddock.

The story is set in the rural south during the depression.
A share-cropper and his two daughters.

The father comes up from the barn
And heads for the house.

He hears his two daughters on the back porch
Laughing and carrying on.

He stops to listen.

They are paging through
A tattered Sears Roebuck Catalog.

They gaze with wonder at the beautiful clothing
And the delightful dolls and accessories
Pointing and laughing and dreaming and hoping.

The father comes around the corner of the house
And jerks the catalog away from them.

Don't you ever let me catch you with this again!

He sends them into the house.

He then sits on the back porch
With the catalog in his hand
And buries his face in his hands.

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"Now, why did the father do that? Was it because he was not a good father? Was it because he was heartless or cruel?

Perhaps he behaved so because he was a good father and only doing what he thought best for his daughters.

Perhaps the father had too often drunk from the well of disappointment and [did] not want to stir false hopes, ill-fated dreams, or expectations in the hearts of his loved ones.

Possibly he felt it would be cruel to allow them to have illusions about beautiful clothes for which they would have no hope ever to own.

Hope is too vulnerable. Better not to hope at all, then to hope and to know crushing disappointment."

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Hope is such a powerful thing.

It has kept people going through horrific circumstances

It is hope that kept the Hebrew people going
Through 400 hundred years of captivity in Egypt

And kept them putting one foot in front of the other
For forty years of wilderness wandering
In search of the promised land.

It was hope that kept the people of Israel from despair
While captive during the exile.

And it's hope that keeps people of color pressing on today
Determined to better their lives
Here in the United States.

Hope is what instills in us the desire
To leave something better
For our children and grandchildren.

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The Apostle Paul writes at the end of 1st Corinthians 13
Faith, hope, and love, these three
And the greatest of these is love.

But let me tell you, hope is just a click behind.

According to Merriam-Webster, hope has two definitions

1: to cherish a desire with anticipation: to want something to happen or be true

- *hopes* for a promotion
- *hoping* for the best
- I *hope* so.

The second definition is this:

2: archaic: TRUST, RELIANCE

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This first is wishful thinking.
The second is certain expectation.

It is in the latter, that the Apostle Paul uses the word.

His definition of hope in a nutshell is just this:

The assurance and certainty of things to come

The confident expectation

The sure inevitability

That what God has promised WILL come to pass.

Romans 8:24-25 NIV

²⁴ . . . hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

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Our Lenten Series theme is *Open Our Eyes, Lord.*

The goal:

Is to open a space for theological reflection, discussion, and confession about race and racism.

It is written for congregations which are predominately white, to explore the intersection of faith and race.

This Sunday, we look at hope

For African American culture

Hope has been an overarching theme.

Songs sung were filled with hope

*Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us.
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.*

It was faith, hope, and love and dogged determination
That helped them to persevere

Through the years of slavery
And reconstruction
Into the Jim Crow years
And the Civil Rights movement

And right up to today, with the George Floyd protests
And the Black Lives Matter movement.

The song they sing continues

We shall overcome!

Hope repeated is the foundation faith is built upon

Romans 5:5 NLT

5 And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

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It is my belief, and I hope it is yours too

That the church is called to be on the cutting edge
Of the fight against racism.

As I said, last week, in a perfect world
We wouldn't need to have this discussion.

But do we live n a perfect world.

Whether we like it or not

Whether we are tired of it or not

To discuss matters that affect

The marginalized and oppressed

Shouldn't be left to the media.

It should be preached from the pulpit!

That's why I thought it incredulous that Freda said

She had never heard a sermon

On racism before she came here.

Jesus calls the church to speak out against oppression

To defend the marginalized, the widowed, the orphan

To live and work as peacemakers.

To work in communities

That lay beyond the walls of churches

In reconciliatory and transformative change.

There's a whole lot of groups out there

Working to transform society

But none as Spirit-led, God-equipped

Christ-inspired, and Christ-empowered as the church.

Can you imagine how powerful he church would be

If we all were pulling in the same direction?

And so, part of the process in this Lenten Series
Is what Dr. Harold Lewis coined, doing the four Ls.

- **Listen** Seek to hear rather than be heard. Seek to understand rather than be understood.
- **Learn** Take a humble, teachable posture. It validates that people of color's experiences are different than ours, and through learning, we may more effectively walk alongside our brothers and sisters of color.
- **Lament** This is the ability to "grieve with those who grieve" creating connection and trust.
- **Lead** Only then can we work together with people of color for the changes needed in creating a just and equitable society.

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Racism is so engrained in our thinking and living and doing
That most of the time we just don't see it.

For instance, As Freda shared last week in SS.
Examples of racism in its more innocuous forms.

Angel food cake is what color? WHITE
Devil's food cake is what color? BLACK

Who wears the white hats? GOOD GUYS
Who wears the black hats? BAD GUYS

The bubonic plague was nicknamed what?
THE BLACK PLAGUE

Who was the black sheep of the family?
THE BAD KID

Or how about the slightly more obvious forms of racism
Called microaggressions.

“You are a credit to your race.” “You are so articulate.”

What the person is really saying is:

People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites. It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent.

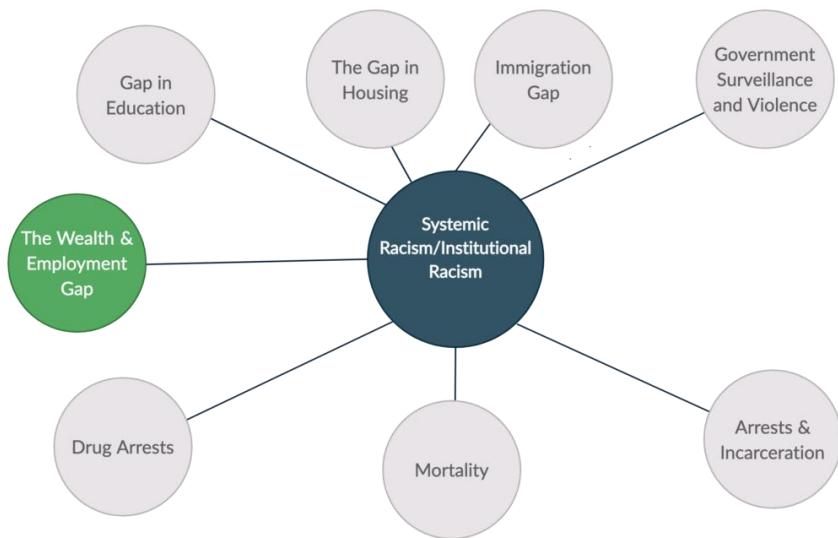
Or:

*“I believe the most qualified person should get the job.”
“Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough.”*

What the person is actually saying is:

People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race. People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and just need to work harder.

To the extremely discriminatory practices
Found in the systemic aspects of racism
As shown in the graph



<https://www.fairfightinitiative.org/systemic-racism/>

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And so, today's question is

Is hope too vulnerable in the struggle against racism?

Is it better not to hope at all?

Than to hope and know crushing disappointment?

No!

Because, it will depend on where you place your hope.

Put down the Sears Roebuck Catalog

And let's not have any wishful thinking here.

Open the Bible!

Let's place our hope in God who fulfills promises.

Lamentations 3:22-24 NLT

22 The faithful love of the Lord never ends!

His mercies never cease.

23 Great is his faithfulness;

his mercies begin afresh each morning.

**24 I say to myself, “The Lord is my inheritance;
therefore, I will hope in him!”**

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Before we move to our Call to Discipleship

I want to pray a poem by Langston Hughes

I Dream a World

I dream a world where man
No other man will scorn,
Where love will bless the earth
And peace its paths adorn

I dream a world where all
Will know sweet freedom's way,
Where greed no longer saps the soul
Nor avarice blights our day.

A world I dream where black or white,
Whatever race you be,
Will share the bounties of the earth
And every man is free,

Where wretchedness will hang its head
And joy, like a pearl,
Attends the needs of all mankind-
Of such I dream, my world!