

TEXT: Romans 8:24-25
THEME: In hope we were saved
SUBJECT: Hope
TITLE: Hope Is An Experiment

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
19 July 2020
Messiah Moravian
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For in hope we have been saved, but a hope seen is not hope; for why hope for what one sees? But, if we hope for what we do not see, we anticipate by perseverance. (Romans 8:24-25, David Bentley Hart's translation)

Those whose hope is weak, settle for comfort or violence. (Erich Fromm)

Hope, for the Christian, is not wishful thinking or mere blind optimism. It is a mode of knowing, a mode within which new things are possible, options are not shut down, new creation can happen. (NT Wright)

For most of Community Renewal's 25-year history, Rosie Chaffold has been a stalwart advocate of her Allendale neighborhood, sharing her story with everyone from governors to gang leaders. A woman who refused to give up even in the face of some frightening opposition, she has been one of the most active Haven House leaders.

Community Renewal International is a faith-based, non-profit organization that brings together caring persons to restore the foundation of safe and caring communities. Founded in 1994, after more than a decade of planning, Community Renewal brings together caring partners to make our world a home where every single child is safe and loved.

"When I moved into Allendale, it was like the neighborhood I grew up in. It was hard-working people and it was a nice, clean area. Neighbors were looking out for neighbors. We didn't even have to lock our houses," says Rosie.

"But after 15 years, most of those who grew up left Shreveport. The neighborhood started to go down. I became a target because I did not approve of what was going on. I know people who got killed or had their houses torn down. My garage was burned down. But that didn't stop me.

"They shot out my windows, and I told my children we were going to have to sleep on the floor. I admit I was scared, but I was not going to let them get the best of me. They were going to have to kill me because they were not going to run me out of my house."

Ms. Rosie held on to the one thing that took her through many dark nights: Hope.

"I felt in some way, God was not going to let Allendale be lost. I asked a man who owned a lot here if I could use it to put in a garden. I have always loved flowers since childhood. They bring beauty and they give me hope and they would give me strength for the rest of the day. He said,

they have already burned your garage down and shot out your windows. Do you want them to kill you?

“I remember telling him that if I die trying to save this neighborhood, I am ready to go. I remember one particular morning I was in my yard feeling sorry for myself. And I started crying. And I said, ‘Lord, bring me a miracle.’ As I raised up to wipe the tears from my eyes, I saw some people walking down the street. They said, ‘Good morning! We are from Community Renewal and we came to help you.’

“The more they talked the more I cried. I said, ‘If you are willing to work with me, I will do all I can to work with you.’ That’s how I got to know Community Renewal. I got more confident in them based on their actions.”

Churches, businesses, schools and many caring individuals have come over the years as Community Renewal partners, helping Ms. Rosie in the Allendale Garden of Hope and Love, as well as at the two Friendship Houses near the garden. Friendship Houses are homes built in vulnerable neighborhoods and lived in by CRI staff that help transform these neighborhoods into places of safety and hope.

Hope is an experiment with God, with oneself, and with history. If we begin with experience, we arrive with some degree of maturity at wisdom. But the proverbs which express the every day wisdom of experience tend to emphasize resignation more than hope: “He who lives on hope dies of hunger.”

Furthermore, if your experience is like that of Ta-Nehisi Coates - beaten up and left for dead when he was 12 while adults walked by and did nothing - you may conclude the world is brutal and nobody is going to help. For Coates, now an adult, a writer, an atheist who has no time for the language of hope, the wisdom of experience is straightforward: no one cares and no reward is coming.

Every beginning contains a surplus of hope. Otherwise we would begin nothing new but remain as we are and hold on to what we have. Whoever begins with hope is aiming to *create new experiences*. Hope entails risks for it challenges the status quo. Hope challenges entrenched power. Hope challenges prevailing prejudices. Hope challenges the presumptions of privilege.

In the experiment of hope the object at stake is one’s own life. Hope puts us to the test and leads us into danger. Therefore, the experiment of hope, like marriage, “. . . is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but discreetly, thoughtfully, and with reverence for God.” To enter into the experiment of hope (Is there a better definition of marriage?) is neither a certain nor an easy way, but it is the way of life in the midst of death.

Hope encourages faith so that it does not degenerate into faintheartedness. Hope strengthens love so that it embraces not only the neighbor but the stranger.

Can we learn hope? Jürgen Moltmann believes we can. If we are not born with hope, if our experiences of life make us wise but not necessarily hopeful, to know hope we have to learn it. We learn love when we say yes to life. We learn hope when we say yes to the future.

Hope says yes to the future! Not a future determined by the past. Not a future governed by what is. But a future that holds the promise of new life. Keeping hope alive is half the job of justice work. By keeping hope alive Rosie created new experiences and together with Community Renewal created life-giving community.

The poet Wendell Berry tells us how this works:

Whatever is foreseen in joy
Must be lived out from day to day.
Vision held open in the dark
By our ten thousand days of work.
Harvest will fill the barn; for that
The hand must ache, the face must sweat.

And yet no leaf or grain is filled
By work of ours; the field is tilled
And left to grace. That we may reap,
Great work is done while we're asleep.

When we work well, a Sabbath mood
Rests on our day, and finds it good.

PRAYER: "Help Me to Believe in Beginnings" Ted Loder (adapted)

O God, help me to believe in beginnings
and in my beginning again,
no matter how often I've failed before.

Help me to make beginnings:
to begin going out of my weary mind into fresh dreams,
daring to make my own bold tracks in the land of now;
to begin forgiving
that I may experience mercy;
to begin questioning the unquestionable
that I may know the truth;
to begin disciplining
that I may create beauty;
to begin sacrificing
that I may accomplish justice;
to begin risking
that I may make peace;
to begin loving
that I may realize joy.

Help me to be a beginning for others,
to be a singer to the songless,
a storyteller to the aimless,
a befriender of the friendless;
to become a beginning of hope for the despairing,
of assurance for the doubting,
of reconciliation for the divided;
to become a beginning of freedom for the oppressed,
of comfort for the sorrowing,
of friendship for the forgotten;
to become a beginning of beauty for the forlorn,
of sweetness for the soured,
of gentleness for the angry,
of wholeness for the broken,
of peace for the frightened and violent of the earth.

Help me to believe in beginnings,
to make a beginning,
to be a beginning,
so that I may not just grow old,
but grow new
each day of this wild, amazing life.