

Children’s Moment

Good morning, girls and boys. We miss seeing you each week. We aren’t there to give you a hug in person, but we’re giving you a great, big hug in our heart and mind – right now! We’re talking about where we find hope today.

Sometimes it’s hard to find hope. Things happen to make us feel sad. Sometimes we get sick. Maybe someone said something to us that hurt our feelings.

What do you do when that happens? I encourage you to pray to Jesus and tell someone. God didn’t make us to be alone, but to be in relationship with God and each other. That’s why we have family, best friends and a church home. Those are the people God gives us to help us feel safe. They can help us feel better. When we try to do things on our own, we often end up feeling isolated and alone. That can make us feel sick, inside and outside.

Here’s a good example. I have two friends with me today. This is Mr. Fish. He’s a betta fish. Esperanza and I have had Mr. Fish for a year and a half. Mr. Fish got sick at the beginning of the summer. He just laid in the bottom of his bowl. He wouldn’t eat. He got very pale. We thought he was going to die. Nothing we did to treat him helped. We were sad.

Then, one day, we bought another betta fish, Mr. Red Fish. See him? We put him in a separate bowl, near Mr. Fish’s bowl. They were separated, but they could see each other. Betta fish tend to fight.

Do you know what happened? Mr. Fish saw Mr. Red Fish. Rather than getting upset or fighting, he started to get better. He swam a bit. He began to eat a little. His color got better. Yes, they were isolated, but they could see each other. Before we knew it, Mr. Fish got well! God helped our fish to get well and be friends, rather than fighting.

That’s a good lesson for us. Even though we’re isolated and feel alone, we can see our family and friends online. God is helping us to learn how to connect and care in new ways. We can be better together.

Let’s pray ... God, show us how we can connect to other people and, by doing so, to make them feel better and help us to be healthy and well.

Message: “What About Your Household?”

Where does your household find hope? Last week, we talked about the nature of hope for those who believe in God. Following Jesus leads us on a path that isn’t obvious or easy but pays off in ways we can’t imagine. The hope we find isn’t limited to some far off, distant future. It also isn’t just an echo of past memories. Both have meaning, but the hope we find is present, here and now, in our daily life.

Sounds easy. It is and it isn’t. It depends on what you’re expecting. For example, here’s one picture of family and friends. They’re engaged together, watching our service. What do you think?
Yeah, it’s a stock photo.

Here are a couple of others picture of families. Not so calm or easy. I’ve also used stock photos, so you’re safe. If your household is like ours, we resemble the second set of photos more often than the first one. That’s okay! In fact, it’s normal.

Faith that has meaning applies to real life situations and circumstances. And life is messy. Life in your household is going to be messy. Life in our neighborhoods is messy. Life all across this marvelous world God gave us is ... messy.

If you ever want to see faith and life at some of it’s messiest, I encourage you to read the story of Abraham, Sarah and their family in the book of Genesis (chapter 12 and on). Really take a look at what their lives, the lives of their children and the lives of their grandchildren were like. They lived through times of hardship, betrayal, hate, violence and doubt. Yet they always found their way to God. As Paul later wrote, “*What does scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness*” (Romans 4:2, NRSV). Abraham was right with God. We might say “Abraham was tight with God.”

All too often, our image of what it means to be faithful and devoted to God is negative. Here’s a humorous and all too true take on it. Paul goes on to say “*For the promise ... didn’t come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith*”

(Romans 4:13). The promise God gives to all of us isn't a promise of pain and punishment when we slip or fall.

The promise God gives to all of us is the promise of pardon and healing by grace. All we have to do is believe; that's what faith is. Jesus confirmed this when he said to Nicodemus, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him”* (John 3:16-17). Jesus is our life saver!

We need to replace the old “nuns with rulers” stereotype in our church, in our household, in our neighborhoods and in our lives. When we do, we'll find that our lives are made better together in every way. That's what believing in Jesus does for us.

We aren't the “church police,” upholding the law on behalf of God. That's a harmful image that promotes a self-righteous presence. We're putting ourselves in God's place. That's what the Pharisees did.

We are ambassadors of faith, who believe God's love can change the world. When we show other people how we love God, love each other, love strangers and even love our enemies in real, meaningful ways, without fear, people take notice. We don't have all the answers. We can't solve all the problems. But we can show we care.

And so we reach out to each other. We look the means to connect in meaningful ways. We call, write, text, email, post, tweet and are present for each other in many ways. The pastor doesn't do it for us. The staff doesn't do it for us. The church council doesn't do it for us. We do it. That's our part in the divine family and in our real household.

The passage from Acts 16 shows us how Lydia did it. She's a good role model. Lydia is the head of her household. She's in business in the market. Lydia cared for everyone in her household, including those who weren't relatives. She led by example. Lydia invited spiritual leaders to come and spend time with the members of her household, knowing they would benefit.

Lydia created an environment where people could connect to each other and Jesus in meaningful ways. She made her household a spiritually vibrant place. It was open and inviting. Lydia didn't carry a ruler. She came with an open heart, open mind and open doors. Sound familiar? Lydia listened. She believed. And Lydia gave others the opportunity to experience the same blessing she received.

Where do you find hope in your household? You find hope when you listen, believe and give others the freedom and love they need to find their own way into a relationship with God. God's got this. Trust God and love others in an encouraging way.

That's how we build a culture of hope. We plant seeds of faith, water them with our tears, give them light with our prayers and wait. I can tell you from personal experience, the waiting is the hard part. We aren't patient people. We get unhappy when our phone doesn't respond in 15-20 seconds. Waiting for seeds of faith to sprout in the lives of our loved ones can take years, even decades.

Paul gets the final word: *“For in [Jesus] every one of God's promises is a ‘Yes.’ For this reason it's through him that we say the ‘Amen,’ to the glory of God”* (1 Corinthians 1:20).

I encourage you to invite God into your household. When you do, you'll find yourself drawn to Jesus and other people. You'll connect in ways you can't imagine now. Take your time. Make a space. Get to know each other. And, when you're ready, show others how to do the same. Most of all, have fun while you're doing it.

That's one way you'll find hope in your household. Amen.

Reflection & Prayer – A Hopeful Moment

May your household be a house of prayer. We are about prayer: prayer that transforms, prayer that equips and enables, prayer that overcomes, prayer that pardons and heals. Prayer is where we find hope.

Our relationship with God begins, continues and ends in prayer.

I invite you to join me in a prayer for hope:

“Lord, help me to hear you saying, ‘I am your hope’ over all the other voices. I’m running to you with both hands stretched out and grabbing onto you. Fill me up with hope and give me a tangible reminder today that hope is an unbreakable spiritual lifeline.” In Jesus’ name, we pray.

Amen (source: unknown)

Acts 16:13-15 (CEB)

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the riverbank, where we thought there might be a place for prayer. We sat down and began to talk with the women who had gathered. One of those women was Lydia, a Gentile God-worshipper from the city of Thyatira, a dealer in purple cloth. As she listened, the Lord enabled her to embrace Paul’s message. Once she and her household were baptized, she urged, “Now that you have decided that I am a believer in the Lord, come and stay in my house.” And she persuaded us.