

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Thursday, February 4, 2021

Christ Gives Us Hope! —And Some Others Should at Least Try

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. —Romans 12:12

But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. —1 Thessalonians 5:8-9

It strikes me as odd that with the advent of the COVID vaccine—and with a 90-plus percent effectiveness rate, no less—there seems to be so little joy and hope in our world. Yes, it will be a few months before our seniors and at-risk populations will all have received the shot, but with relief just weeks away, why do I find so little sense of hopefulness and relief among us?

It would appear that hope has gone out of style and we are living among an ever-growing cult of caution and fear. Yes, I believe in the basic precautions which we have been honoring over the past ten months and shall continue to practice them, and I am adamant that vulnerable groups be specially protected, so do not think me a virus denier! But even with the vaccine presently going out among us, we are finding new reasons for worry. The press loves telling us about mutations of the virus. (This is common among viruses, and the mutations are nearly always less lethal.) I felt some relief having had the virus myself but have since been frequently reminded that I could still be a transmitter, and just might get it again. (This too flies in the face of many years of scientific study.) The vaccine is over ninety percent effective which is incredibly good for a vaccine, but I continue to hear cautions about being one of the unlucky ones who could still spread the germ despite being inoculated. Kay was recently showing me an article from a physician who recommends that even those who have had the vaccine and/or the virus (and recovered) should still quarantine for fourteen days and then only see their young grandchildren at a safe distance. We have become very good at worrying. Yes, these stories of woe are genuine possibilities, but it makes me think of the genuine possibility that I be struck and killed by falling airplane parts. We are losing a healthy sense of reasonable and unreasonable risk.

Doctors are trained to make us worry, and there is something to be said for this. But a good physician also knows that a patient must have hope! When all a patient hears is a steady flow of warnings and doom, bad things can happen. People become

depressed, which adds a boatload of negative medical implications. Some react to relentless negativity by deliberate defiance and denial of the doctor's pleas. We see a lot of both kinds of these responses all around us in this pandemic. The medical community, our political leaders and the media have all failed to hold out a message of hope. (And telling people that if we wear more masks and isolate even more, we will less likely to die, does not qualify as hope in my book!) People ask, "When can we stop wearing masks?" "When will things get back to normal?" and the answers are not any too rosy. No one wants to be the one who might later be accused of holding out false hope, and besides, the people with the gloomiest predictions and warnings always seem to look like the intellectual giants. We are told of the masks coming off in another year, or that this might become the "new normal." Even as victory seems within sight, we are becoming very good at being pessimistic. Wouldn't it be great if we started hearing a few projections of when the numbers of deaths and hospitalizations are likely to significantly drop, and the vaccine gets the upper hand? It seems that nobody dares to offer much hope, or even talk about the future.

People live by hope, and we die without it. This is the joy of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, for we have the hope of his presence with us in life, and the hope of glory beyond this world. Paul exhorts us to focus upon our hope in Christ as this will become a source of endless joy. When he tells us of the spiritual armor which we must wear to battle the evils of this world, hope is nothing less than our helmet, a more than essential piece of protection! As Christians we have a tremendous wealth of hope which can sustain us in times like these. We also have Good News and sustaining strength to give to those around us. We are a people of hope.

My prayer is that a contagion of hope will spread across our gloom ridden world, and that those in positions of power would also do their part to hold out at least a little hope.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O Lord, in whom is our hope, remove far from us, we pray thee, empty hopes and presumptuous confidence. Make our hearts so right with thy most holy and loving heart, that hoping in thee we may do good; until that day when faith and hope shall be abolished by sight and possession, and love shall be all in all. - Christina Rossetti