

“Hope in the Trinity”

May the grace and peace of almighty God be with you.

I have always loved going for drives in the car. Even as a toddler, my parents can attest that I often persuaded them to let me go with them pretty much anywhere that the vehicle went. The trouble, of course, was that I had a tendency to get motion sickness. My mother would say that is a bit of an understatement because as she recalls: there was a guarantee that I would get sick within the first five minutes of the trip. We lived 45 minutes from the nearest city, so you might imagine how interesting Saturday grocery trips often were.

Although my spirit loved these long trips, my physical body was often relieved to hear the engine stop as we safely arrived back home. In fact, I could almost feel myself begin to perk up as we passed what later became known as Frasier’s field. Frasier’s field was nothing more than a small patch of unmaintained grass, but for me, it was a symbol of hope that I would soon be home safe and sound.

I eventually grew older and overcame my tendency toward motion sickness, but no matter how much my life has changed, Frasier’s field has remained a constant beacon of hope – a reminder that no matter how difficult the journey has been, there is rest and relaxation ahead. I once had a terrible car accident and although the evening was filled with fear and trembling, as the tow truck passed Frasier’s field, I was filled with an overwhelming assurance that everything was going to be alright. Likewise, in our younger years, I spent many late nights driving Nathalie home for a 1 am curfew. The late night drive into the city wasn’t so bad, but the 45 minute drive home often turned into 75 or 80 minutes amidst the presence of exhaustion, foggy darkness, and wildlife. But no matter how chaotically difficult the journey, as I approached Frasier’s field, I became hopefully expectant that rest and safety were just around the bend.

Perhaps many of us have similar stories of places or symbols that serve as a reminder of what is to come – symbols or landmarks that inspire hope amidst the uncertainty of life’s journey. For some the cross is a symbol of hope, while others see hope in the eyes of a new born child, or in the springtime cycle of rebirth. These symbols fill us with anticipation or expectation of the good and pleasing things that are yet to come. They often provide comfort amidst trying circumstances and hope for a brighter tomorrow. Hope is a powerful tool, one that can be used to both benefit and hinder. Misplaced hope can often be damaging, just as well placed hope can bring about healing. Sadly, the world is filled with people and circumstances that often appear to be without hope. One need only to turn on the news to be reminded of the chaos, discrimination, selfishness, and hatred that exist across the globe and within our own backyard. Situations that perhaps might seem hopeless.

But it is into this illusion of hopelessness that Christ speaks in John chapter 16.

The gospel text for this morning, Trinity Sunday, is a short four verses that partially describe the way in which God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit interact with one another. But these verses are part of a much longer farewell dialogue that Christ is giving before his return to “the one whom sent Him” (John 16:4). In this dialogue, Christ reassures listeners that although he must depart for an unknown duration of time, they will one day see him again. And in addition to this promise, Christ acknowledges that the period in

between his departure and return might be painful or difficult (John 16:16-24). John quotes Jesus saying that “in the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world” (John 16:33).

This dialogue comes before the passion narrative in John’s account of the gospel, but Christ’s words might be heard both in relation to his impending death and resurrection or his later ascension into heaven. John’s gospel does not include an ascension narrative, which might explain the particular placement of this text within his gospel account. But, regardless of the context in which these verses are interpreted, what remains is Christ’s promise that in his absence, God will send the Holy Spirit, whom Christ refers to as both the Advocate and the Spirit of Truth. The function of this Holy Spirit, according to today’s gospel text, is to guide in the way of truth and to declare for us all that is given by God, through Christ. The Holy Spirit then, through the gift of Jesus Christ, declares the loving presence of God’s truth, compassion, mercy, understanding, and grace. It serves as a reminder of the hope and the promise that we have both in and through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The gospel message at the heart of today’s lectionary readings for Trinity Sunday is a message a hope that hinges on the promises of God that are manifest in and through both Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And as Paul reminds us in the book of Romans: “hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:5). The word hope, or *elpo* in the original Greek, refers to something that can be trusted, something that can be expected with full confidence. Hope then is connected with truth and truth is the Word of God.

Hope, as Martin Luther stated as he neared death, exists in and because of the Word of God. Hope exists in and because of the promises of God that are made known to us through both Word and Sacrament. It is for this reason that Luther also suggested a need to hear the gospel daily so that he would never forget the hope or promise made available to him.

Hope exists in faith, in complete trust that we are justified by grace through faith in the gift of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

Just as this farewell discourse contains promises that produce hope – it also contains challenges for Disciples of Christ. Christ offers a challenge to live in adherence with the leading and the direction of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth. The text also offers a challenge to confidently trust and to cling to the Word and promises of God despite the many voices of this world that attempt to influence differently. Will we listen to the circumstantial voices of suffering and sorrow? Or will we cling with full expectation and hope to the promises of God that are ours in Jesus Christ? Will we place our hope in the triune God? Or will we place our hope in the fleeting things of this world?

Frasier’s field was a landmark that, for me, served as a reminder that the journey home was almost complete. But as time passes by, it slowly shifts from a field into a forest and soon it will be undistinguishable from the acres of trees that surround it. My hope was placed in an earthly entity that can hardly compare to the hope that is ours through the promises of God that are made manifest in Jesus Christ. Promises that have and will always continue to stand the test of time. For God is constant and reliable, consistent and always faithful.

Much like the road that leads back into my hometown, the journey of life often has moments of unexpected surprises, of suffering, sorrow, sickness, persecution, and pain. But despite the uncertainty

of this life, there is a sure and certain hope in God's almighty love which promises that the journey, no matter how joyful or difficult, is never walked alone. Christ promises that this life is but a small portion of the journey and that one day "pain will turn into joy" (Romans 16:20) and every need will be perfectly met. There is hope in the promises of God. Hope for today, hope for tomorrow, and hope of an eternity spent in presence and perfect communion with the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.