

Pitching Your Tent in the Land of Hope
Acts 2:14a, 22-36
July 1, 2018

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We are just over halfway through the Summer Book Club, reading the New Testament together. I'm enjoying hearing about your experiences. Many of us are trying to catch up or stay caught up. Some of you have changed from your go-to translations to make reading easier, or just different. You're sharing the new things you're learning and noticing. That's what it's all about really, picking up the Bible and discovering something new that informs your faith or even changes you.

As you know, each pastor has agreed to preach from their favorite text in that week's reading. So for me, that's like letting a kid loose in the candy store! It's hard to choose.

I chose today's passage from Acts because it's a way of telling the good news that resonates with me, and has very much shaped my ministry; and I *hope* my discipleship.

Let me set the stage for the reading – because we're coming in the middle of a scene. It's the first Pentecost. People from all over, speaking all different languages, have come to celebrate the Jewish Festival of Weeks. As they are gathered (you know the story), wind sweeps in and flames appear – a startling sight – and they are filled with the Holy Spirit – power so great that they were suddenly able to speak in, and understand, different languages.

In that setting, Peter begins his first sermon, the first proclamation of the gospel in the book of Acts, to explain what's going on; our text today. Let's pray for God to shed light on our reading:

Holy Spirit, fill our minds with understanding and our hearts with your love, as we hear your Word to us today. Amen.

Acts 2: 14a, 22-36

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them:

You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him,

“I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
moreover, my *flesh will live in hope*.

For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One experience corruption.

You have made known to me the ways of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.”

‘Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,

“He was not abandoned to Hades,
nor did his flesh experience corruption.”

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore

exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, *he has poured out this that you both see and hear*. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.' "

Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.'

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

As I read that lengthy passage I'm reminded of the preacher who has only two sermons left and feels an urgency to pack all the good news into a tiny space. Oh wait. That's me!

This is a packed reading. I feel Peter's passion. He doesn't want the people to miss what's happening because it's good news that is going to change their lives. He tells them that this power just poured out on them in wind and flames is the same power that allowed Jesus to perform wonders during his life, and the same power that freed Jesus from death; that God did all of this through Jesus, just as God promised in a vision to David, their great king and prophet. And, as if to say, "We saw this coming," Peter quotes David's reaction to this promise from God: "...my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover, my *flesh will live in hope*." Hope. In this impassioned sermon of Peter's, we are reminded of the meaning of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus: Christ is God's *agent of salvation*, and because of that you and I, and all God's creation, can live in hope.

My flesh will live in hope, David said. Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, translates that verse, *I've pitched my tent in the land of hope*. Now that sounds like a relocation that is life-changing.

Have you met anyone who seems to have pitched their tent in the land hope? Someone who seems hope-filled in all circumstances? I have. Her name is Rose. She was a member of my last church and someone I greatly admire. In my eyes, Rose doesn't only pitch a tent there, she has poured her foundation in the land of hope, and set up permanent quarters! Despite every reason not to.

Rose is the mother of four now-adult children, two of whom are twins. The twins were born quite prematurely, at only 28 weeks. Along with the expected needs of premature infants, one of the twins faced significant health challenges. He was born with a hole in his heart and suffered a severe brain bleed. The doctors had to perform life-saving surgery to stop the bleed and close the hole; on this tiny 2 lb. 7 oz. baby! He survived the surgery, but faced a long list of other concerns including blood and breathing issues, cerebral palsy, hydrocephalus, and hemiparesis, or severe weakness, on his right side. They were in for a long haul of medical care, which continues to this day.

These wonderful young men, each with unique and captivating personalities, are now in their 30s. Rose and her husband's roles as their medical shepherds and chief caregivers, persist. And yet, Rose is who comes to mind when thinking about someone living in hope. I called Rose this week to reflect with her on all her family had been through, and what they continue to manage. I asked her what role hope played. At first she just said "Well, you do what you have to do." Which really is true, right? Life has a way of

pushing us forward. But then she went on to say that you also cling to God's promises. *You have to leave it to God.*

In those months when the boys were in the NICU, living in their "glass houses" as they use to say with their 6 year-old son, the family would have daily meetings with the doctors. One meeting in particular stands out for Rose. The doctors reported that they had identified *50 major concerns* of one of the twins. 50! And all major! Rose remembers thinking, "I can't even think about this!" She knew she couldn't fix it. "I had to let it go and trust God to protect us," she told me.

When I asked Rose how her faith informed her response in that moment, she immediately replied, "Well, Christ let go. On the cross, he let go. He didn't say. 'I'm in charge.' Or, 'I'm going do it this way.' He prayed (while the disciples slept, Rose laughed!) and he let go."

Letting go. Let's be clear, Rose's letting go wasn't giving up, and it wasn't doing nothing. In fact, there was a lot that would be asked of that family; and continue to be. While we don't think of letting go as an act of power, Rose's letting go, that she saw modeled in Jesus' life and death, was a way of accessing power far greater than her or her circumstances. That's the power that God showed in conquering death. The power that made King David's heart sing. And Peter reminds us in this text that it's the same power poured into us through the Holy Spirit; a power from God that gives us hope.

I wish I could be like Rose and have my tent permanently pitched in hope. I'm guessing though, that even Rose would admit she occasionally wants to uproot that tent. We all do. Maybe we won't face a list of 50 major challenges in one sitting, but we each will face major challenges, no doubt. Sometimes in the face of those challenges, we can claim God's promises with

great confidence, and other days we are just barely clinging to them, easily uprooted, wanting to move our tent to the land of quick fixes. I know I'm clinging now. I'll be leaving my ministry here to have more flexibility to care for my parents, and I have no idea what's ahead; how difficult it will get for them or for me and my brothers, or how long this will last. I can hope for easy, but that hope would not be of Christ. The thing about hope in Christ is that the power doesn't have to come from you. The *choice* to let go of where you're living now and move your tent to the land of hope is yours, but the power to get there and stay there has already been given to you.

Packing up and moving into the land of hope can be a big adjustment. Moves are, aren't they? I'm reminded of when I moved from Atlanta to D.C. shortly after college. I had a new position, in a new place, where I knew no one. And I was so hopeful for all the cool stuff I would do, the new friends I would make, and the interesting things I would experience. The possibilities seemed endless. Hope does that. It opens possibilities. When we choose to live in the land of hope, this hope we know in Christ, the possibilities *are* endless because God showed us at the cross that nothing, absolutely nothing, would get in the way of God's plans for our salvation. And that is some good news.

Last May, when Kristie and I joined you, we all had the choice whether or not to relocate to the land of hope. Together, we stepped into the challenges before us, sometimes filled with hope, sometimes barely clinging to God's promise to redeem everything, and needing to let go and rely on God's power to lead us. That is the life of faith. We will continue to have opportunities every day to choose where to pitch our tents. Dave Tolmie, in a few minutes, will invite you into a very visible way we here at First Pres can continue to stake our collective claim in the land of hope, as he tells you about the long-

envisioned first floor renovation project. Actually, as I think about that project, I'm thinking we may look like we're in tents for a bit! Maybe you'll think of all the plastic walls as tents of hope, wide open with possibility.

My friends, you have been given this power of hope. By the grace of God, it is in you. Christ's resurrection was not just a one-time event. God through the power of the Holy Spirit is always overcoming darkness. And that power is not dependent on your or my effort to think positively enough, or believe enough, or trust enough – that power has already been poured into you a power that continues to redeem the world, and your 50 major or minor concerns.

That is the power of hope in Christ. May the promise of it make your heart glad, and your tongue rejoice! Amen.