

## Our Hope

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“You are the hope of all the ends of the earth. . . .” – Psalm 65:5

You can hope that, you can hope for, and you can hope in. The first two are psychological hopes; the third is theological hope, and the third is our business this morning.

You can hope that the test results will be negative. Most of us do, most of the time. You can hope for a sunny day for the beach wedding. And as often as not, we get what we hope for.

But to hope in requires something bigger than test results or the weather. To hope in requires God, for nothing less than God deserves that kind of ultimate, deepest, highest hope. And nothing but God can generate that kind of hope. To hope in God is to live in such a way that God is both the object and the source of our hope. We hope not simply that God will, but because God already has.

And thus the logic of the construction of Scripture. People sometimes wonder why the Bible is constructed as it is, and one of the answers – there are many – is because Genesis shows us that God already has and Revelation shows us that God will, and the bridge that leads from the one to the other is called hope. And that's where you and I live. People of faith live under the bridge called hope, whether we want to or not.

“Blessed are you, O Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who has made us captives of hope.” So do our Jewish sisters and brothers pray on Tisha B'Av, the most solemn of Jewish holidays, when they remember, with ritual mourning, the destruction of the First Temple, the Second Temple, and all the temples of life and learning and culture and civilization that the Jewish people have watched destroyed by the enemies of divine chosenness.

The prophet Zechariah provides us the phrase “captives of hope” in the ninth chapter of his book, written at a time when the Israelites were hard pressed to hope. It was around the year 520 BCE, and the Jewish people had been permitted to return from exile in Babylon to their homeland in Judah. But Judah was a hot mess. Seventy years of Babylonian oppression had taken their toll, leaving the country poor, in conflict, and in disrepair. The cultural and religious center of Jewish life, Solomon's Temple, remained in ruins, and efforts to restore it were met with resistance and ridicule. If ever a people needed hope, it was the Jews who were attempting to rebuild their holy commonwealth.

And the Jewish people found it. They didn't generate it, they didn't manufacture it, and they didn't invent it. They found the hope that, like love, is that divine gift which would not let them go. From God's call to Abraham and Sarah, to God's deliverance at the Sea of Reeds, to God's sustenance in decades of wandering, to God's providing prophets, priests, and kings – in and through it all, God provided hope for a struggling nation. God's hope is as inexhaustible as God's care, and they are inextricably bound.

And that makes God's people a people of hope. To believe in God is to hope axiomatically;

there is no such thing as a hopeless believer. No matter how dire the circumstances, personal or social; no matter how chaotic the historical moment may be; no matter how widely the poison of cynicism may spread – a believer in God hopes. That's one of the messages we're learning from the book of Job.

“You are the hope of all the ends of the earth,” the psalmist sings in our text for the morning, and on that solid rock of divinely given hope we build. People of faith know that governments come and go; we do not hope, ultimately, in them. People of faith know that economies come and go; we do not hope, ultimately, in them. People of faith know that social arrangements and political passions come and go; we do not hope, ultimately, in them. People of faith know that the latest and most menacing weapons come and go; we do not hope, ultimately, in them.

We place our ultimate hope in the one who was there before we – with our governments and our economic arrangements and our social passions and our weapons of mass destruction – got here, and that one will be here long after we're all gone. It is that one, in whom, Acts says, “we live and move and have our being” that we hope. We who believe hope in God just as a fish hopes in water: unconsciously, reflexively, inevitably. Hope, as the saying goes, springs eternal – not because we're eternal, but because God is.

In this factious age, when yards are cluttered with signs proclaiming our disagreements, and when the news from Washington continues to reek of bitterness and rancor, and when the mongers of fear and prejudice and hatred and violence have been given implicit permission to roam to and fro on the earth, we hope. We hope not in ourselves and in our schemes, but in God. We hope in the one who brings light out of darkness, courage out of fear, and calm out of chaos. We hope in the one who brought again from the dead our Lord, Jesus Christ. We hope in the one who has entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation.

To that one be the glory and the honor and the power – and all our hope – now and forever.  
Amen.