



GPS GUIDE: MAY 22, 2022

Grow. Pray. Study.

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Sermon: Better Together

As we move through this season of stewardship, we ask that you spend a few moments in thoughtful reflection each day. Find a quiet moment, center your heart, notice the world around you, and pray this giving prayer as we build “a future with hope” together.

Prayer: Holy One: Over and over, we become scattered and separated. Over and over, like a good shepherd, you find us and bring us home. For all the togetherness you’ve granted us at FCC Birmingham, thank you. For the gift of faith that gets us through times of separation, thank you. For the gifts of connection and community, mission and ministry, hope and commitment, thank you. In your generosity and grace, O God, grant me the wisdom to see what I can give to deepen our faith, strengthen our community, extend our witness, and build a future with hope. Amen.

Monday: Read Psalm 42

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. The human heart runs on hope. When things are trying and difficult, we need something to anticipate. We need something to pursue and prepare for. Unfortunately, we so easily place our hope in things that never materialize or never meet our expectations. The psalmist addresses his discouragement by reminding himself to put his hope in God, where it belongs. No matter how dark things get for her, she will continue to praise her maker and trust in God's goodness. Name some things, other than God, in which you have placed your hope? How do those things fall short of God whose promises are secure? Think back on a time of difficulty. How were you able to experience trust in God to move you toward a future with hope?

Tuesday: Read Genesis 21: 1-7; 1Timothy 4: 12-16

Too often people say, “I’m too old to do that.” or “They’re too young to make a difference.” These readings stand as witnesses that God’s work has no age limit. Timothy was not too young to bring a prophetic word from God. Abraham and

Sarah were not too old to start a great nation. Do you have an excuse ready when God calls you? It doesn't matter who you are or what your age - God can use you to make a difference – use you to bear God's hope into this world. God isn't looking for people with lots of money, or jaw dropping good looks, or the proper education. God is looking for ordinary people, of all ages, willing to put their trust in God. Have you ever considered yourself too old/young for a ministry role in the church? What ministry of hope might God be calling you to right now?

Wednesday: Read Acts 3: 1-19

The gospel that the early church proclaimed was that God was in the process of fulfilling the promise to restore all things. Many will debate the truth of a miracle story like this. But to do so is to miss the greater truth: their whole life together was a demonstration of the faith that in Jesus the Christ God was fulfilling all the great promises of restoration and renewal. Their very existence served as evidence that the “wonderful times of refreshment” were already coming “from the presence of the Lord” and that “the final restoration of all things” that “God promised long ago through his prophets” was already in the process of being fulfilled. What Peter testifies to is making our relationship with God the primary focus of our lives. Like any relationship, it's something we must cultivate. We do so by engaging in resurrection practices - signs of the presence of God. We cultivate the presence of God in our lives by devoting ourselves “to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42), working together in “one heart and mind” (Acts 4:32), meeting the needs of those around us, welcoming all we meet with the grace that God has given us. We cultivate the renewing presence of God in our midst by practicing our faith *together*. How will you – how will we as a church - cultivate the Spirit's presence and work in our midst? How are we called to live into God's promise of a future with hope?

Thursday: Read Luke 22: 54-62

Peter; Simon; The Rock; The one on whom Jesus would build his church. This is the same Peter we find in the courtyard on the eve of Jesus' crucifixion. Though he sat in the darkness, the firelight made his face recognizable enough. He was caught. Three times identified as one of Jesus' followers. Three times Peter denied it. Fred Craddock says the story is clear - he was tested, and he failed. Then, just as the cock crowed Jesus turned and looked at Peter. That look triggered his memories of Jesus' promise and prediction and he was immediately overcome with remorse. It was the first step on the path to repentance and restoration. We don't know just how the restoration took place, yet Luke verifies it in his writing when it is Peter who delivers the Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:14). Following Jesus is difficult! Sometimes we fail. We forget our promises to stand firm. We lurk in the shadow hoping someone else will be identified as a disciple instead of us. Jesus did not give up on Peter. He will not

give up on us either! When have you found it difficult to stay with Jesus? Have there been times you've hidden your faith? How do you move toward restoration after falling short? Know that Jesus looks upon you with love and confidence and has the power to bring you, like Peter, into a future filled with hope.

Friday: Read Romans 15: 4-13

Our beliefs and attitudes are a key component in determining our health. In this regard, hope plays an important role. A person's faith can be a great source of hope. Paul writes “I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.” He points out that God should be the source of our hope and that a Christian receives power to have this hope by the Holy Spirit. We can choose to believe that God's Holy Spirit will empower us to make the changes we are trying to make. This ought to give us an additional degree of hope. In his book *God, Faith and Health*, Jeff Levin suggests “Those who take these messages to heart may have an increased resistance to disease, decreased risk of depression and emotional distress, and hastened recovery from illness. This is because faith leads to hope, and hope has physiological consequences.” I believe that hope does have a positive impact on our health. How has your relationship with God given you a higher degree of hope and optimism? Does placing your trust in Jesus empower you to live life in a more healthy and hopeful way?

Saturday: Read Lamentations 22:19-26

The beloved hymn *Great is Thy Faithfulness* is based on today's scripture. Read (or sing) the hymn below. How will you see God's mercies today? How does God give you strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow?

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Refrain

Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Refrain

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Refrain