

**Our Hope in the God of the Living**  
**November 10, 2013**  
**By Pastor Laura Hehner**

We live in a place of insides and outsides.

Of things hidden and things seen.

We live in a place where entire worlds are closed up inside of scalps...

Where we can feel the deepest love in our hearts,

without a single other person ever even knowing it's there.

This world we live in, now---as we are---

---isn't one where all things are seen and known immediately upon existing...

(...just because it's there.)

And because of this, we live in a place of guessing. Of wondering. ... Of dreams.

...Thoughts about what *might* be---what *could* be---

---past what we can see with our eyes, or touch with our hands.

If you follow us on facebook, and join us in our weekly thoughts and meditations,

You might have already seen that our spiritual focus this week, here at Deer Park, is on "hope."

Since last Sunday, we've been posting words, and images, and pieces of scripture,

Which help us to keep our minds and hearts centered

on that word and what it means to each of us as we move along.

That word...Hope.

That place in our souls of sight without seeing.

Feeling without touching.

Of wanting, before we even know what's there to be received.

And this, I think, is one of the most beautiful parts of being human. Being a person.

This ability to focus on the unseen, and stay there in those places that don't yet exist.

to imagine, what might surround us in a time that hasn't yet come, but will---

---as long as we're willing---

---as long as we're blessed---to stick around long enough

to move past the now and into the next.

Our Little Green Church reached over 600 people this week.

So that means all of those people, in all of those places---

---those places we can't see or touch in front of us, but are there, all the same---

---they were all thinking on this idea of hope, right along with us.

...Sharing the thoughts and words. Sharing the scriptures with each other,

And hopefully thinking about them now and again as they drove from place to place.

I thought about it a lot too, as I moved around,

and especially as we came closer to sitting with each other, today.

This word, HOPE.

I thought about what it meant.

And before any *words* came to mind, a memory filled me up, instead.

Instantly.

I was suddenly sitting in my car again.

I remembered that moment I've shared with you before:

Sitting out there, in that deep, dry cold.

...My knuckles splitting and bleeding, and swollen.

Looking out, into the dark.

Staring at that Sprouts sign, across the street, through my rolled up window.

[At the height of the aftermath of the recession, all of my plans for my life seeming to be gone, destroyed. My calling in question.]

During that fifteen minute break from earning minimum wage,

only tossed aside carts and piled cars filling my eyes...

While I saw something entirely different---something other---than all of those things.

In that dark, seeing the sunlight pour through a window that was mine, but didn't yet exist.

In the chilled cushion of that drivers seat, sitting in a chair at my desk which wasn't yet my desk,

From my fogging car window, looking out from a different pane of glass,

not into a view of the glowing green letters across the way,

But into the view of green pines smothering mountains all around me.

I had no business imaging those things from where I sat,

but those images filled me up all the same.

As different as that place was from where I sat, as impossible as it seemed

that I would ever be in that place I saw in my mind,

My heart HOPED, that what was inside and what was outside, might one day look the same.

When have you been there, in that space?

In that space of dark and light. That place of hope?

...Let's each of us open ourselves for a moment, to remember.

Some of you might be there, right now, as we sit together, in this room.

Because this life we live---this world we were born into---

It's filled with a lot of hurt, and pain, and hardship, and struggle.

A lot of it kept deep inside, away from the eyes of other people as we walk around.

...A lot of times we find ourselves surrounded

by sights that we never wanted our eyes to touch.

But they're there, all the same.

And we feel a need—a drive—a yearning---

---inside, to see what is, change into what might be.

We find ourselves caught up in a place where

what we look at and what we see aren't the same.

We find ourselves in that place of hope.

Our scripture readings for today, bring us there, too.

From Haggai [HAG-ay-ai], Chapter 2:

(Haggai 2) In the second year of King Darius [duh-RAI-uhs], in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai, saying: 2 Speak now to Zerubbabel [zeh-RUH-buh-behl] son of Shealtiel [shee-AL-tih-ehl], governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak [dzhee-HOZ-uh-dak], the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say, 3 Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing?

Here Haggai [HAG-ay-ai], and the Isrealites,

are surrounded by the destruction of their most cherished things.

--Their most sacred thing... the Temple, in Jerusalem.

But what image is brought to their minds---their souls---as they look into all of this ruin?

As they look into the destruction of all they held dear,

their hearts are shown a very different place, right?

From verse 4:

4 Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel [zeh-RUH-buh-behl], says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak [dzhee-HOZ-uh-dak], the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, 5 according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear. 6 For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; 7 and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts.

Past all of this ruin, past all of this pain in front of them,

God's people are shown something entirely other than these things.

Something that does not yet exist, but will,

as long as they continue moving forward step by step,

Willing to follow God in the now, through those moments which lead into the nexts.

Staring into the rubble of what used to be their temple,

God asks them all to see something *different* in its place.

Something new. Something beautiful.

Something far more amazing than even that thing they now mourn losing,

Standing high in front of them.

A gorgeous splendor to behold.

A new temple, on a new day... neither of which yet existing.

I'm pretty sure it was tough for the Israelites, in that moment,

to accept these possibilities waiting in front of them,

I'm sure they felt they had no business imagining these soothing things

so different from the pain in front of their eyes.

But it was there, all the same.

In that place of trouble, they found themselves in a place of hope.

Alright... so this hope, it's a beautiful thing. A special thing.

One of the amazing parts of being human.

This ability to see past this moment into things which aren't yet there.

But where does it come from? And how do we keep it?

Our readings for today tell us that our hope comes from God, right?

From Haggai [HAG-ay-ai], as they stare at the destruction, it's the presence of God

which tells them to see something else---something different---

--in those times still out of sight.

In our reading from Psalms, the Psalmist says, from verse 14:

14 The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. 15 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. 16 You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing. 17 The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. 18 The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. 19 He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them. 20 The LORD watches over all who love him.

And I agree with the words from both of these places.

Not because they're there, in The Book.

Not because they were scrolled in ancient Hebrew...

...It has nothing to do with a reverence for scripture.

I agree with these words because I've seen this truth with my own eyes,  
and felt it in my own heart.

I know this to be true, because our God is a *living* God.

A breathing God. A moving God,

And I've watched God live, and breathe,

and move in my own life enough to *know* that God is here, with us.

Next to us. Inside of us, through all moments.

That we are never alone in any of the places we find ourselves,

and that all we could ever hope to see,

comes from---moves out from---the holy soul of that Life all around us.

See, if God is God, then God is all things. All places. All possibilities.

God is the very Life inside of you. And around you.

God *is* the past and the present. And God *is* all things that will come to us later, too...

... and I think we humans have this gift of hope inside of us,

in being in relationship with God.

Because in being in relationship with God, we are in relationship with Life.

And in that, we are in touch with all of the possibilities

that come from that infinite source of love and care all around us.

All things are possible in God, because God is all things.

Those things we can see and feel in front of us,

and those things we can't even begin to strain our tiny human minds hard enough to imagine.

[And we shouldn't let ourselves be fooled...

Whether we believe in God or not, we're *always* in relationship with God.

We're in relationship with God because we're living and breathing.

And God being life, we are always there, with God. Always in the presence of God.

Not believing in God doesn't mean our *relationship* with God isn't there,

it just means we're not on the best of terms in that relationship.

And that simple fact of being alive and in relationship with Life,

I believe—just like these writers--- is what drops that tiny seed of hope into our souls.

Naturally. Without strain.]

So yes, I agree with what these scriptures are telling us:

God is the source of all of the hope inside of us.

And I also believe what they implied behind the words:

That being in *deeper* relationship with God. *Knowing* God. *Acknowledging* God.

Letting our eyes *see* God in the life around us,

[past what people who don't believe allow themselves to see...]

.... and talking to God through each day...

... this natural seed of hope inside of us grows into something big.

Something beautiful. Something that spreads life through our souls.

In knowing God, and trusting in God, we are entrusted with a greater hope,

that fills our minds and souls more deeply than

anything we could imagine for our lives on our own.

Because we move with a knowledge that God moves all things, including ourselves.

And that through all of the places we pass into and out from,

as we live from hour to hour,

God is with us, God is carrying us. God is holding us up,

and ushering us always into something new.

[In mindfully living in the heart of God,

all of the possibilities in God's soul come more clearly to our eyes,

So that as we look into the destruction of what we once knew,

we also know beyond a doubt that---we *see*---

---the gorgeous possibility of things that aren't yet here, but are to come.

Our hope---wherever we stand---

---comes from nothing other than the spirit of our living God.

And the more intimately we live with that Spirit, the more deeply hope grows in our own souls,

As we look past what's in front of us, into the things we can't yet see. ]

After those days of staring out into the dark,

When I look out the window, now, through the sunlight,

into the green of those gorgeous pines smothering the hills outside,

Seeing in front of me those seemingly impossible sights

I thought I had no business imagining, before...

...I'm filled with the glory of the presence of God in my life.

And I'm reminded that God carries us to all of the places we will go.

And I'm sure the Israelites---after all of those years of staring mournfully into that rubble---

---then suddenly finding themselves looking into the towering structure of their new temple,

Watching people from foreign lands come and go, in and out of its walls---

---Well, I'm sure their souls were overwhelmed, too---just the same---

by that holy beauty of God which carried them

into that place where what they saw in their hearts,

finally matched what stood before their eyes.

As we move each day through this world of insides and outsides,  
Things hidden and things seen...

Let's remember that God moves through all of it.

Let's hold tight to God as we're carried each day  
into all of the beautiful possibilities of God's holy soul.

Through all things---rough and smooth, the nows and the nexts---  
---let's hold tight to the *hope* we're blessed to know within us,  
in knowing our holy, living God.

Amen.