

“Hope for the World”

Matthew 22:36 & 28:18, Ephesians 4:12-16

June 10, 2012

Pastor James York

Where is our hope for the future? Is our hope in a future leader, a movement, a political party, or even technology? There are an abundance of issues and ideas being discussed around these questions. I wonder if the unrest in the world today is the symptom of a deeper longing. Sociologists tell us that we live in the loneliest time ever in the history of the world. There's also great spiritual hunger in the world today. What truly is the world's most critical need? What are people's deepest longings? I believe that what the world most critically needs and people's deepest longings, each of you already have. Even more, God is calling you to share it and God has equipped you with all the special gifts and abilities that you need. It gets even better for Jesus has promised to help you, guide you, and be with you as you share it.

The world's most critical need, and people's deepest longing, is to be in a loving relationship with God. If you want to truly change the world then show someone they are loved by God and help them nurture their relationship with God.

The religious leaders were dealing with numerous issues within the church such as political mess with the Roman Empire, poverty, anxiety and unrest. One of them asked Jesus. **Matthew 22:36-40 "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."**

After Jesus resurrection and before his ascension into heaven, his final words to the disciples was a commission for them, and us, for the church. **Matthew 28:18-20** “Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given

to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." If you had to sum up the commission in two words, what words would you choose? How about love and grace?

First we are to make disciples. A disciple is someone who is constantly seeking to grow in their love for God and grow their love for others. A disciple follows Jesus and models Jesus. A disciple is constantly learning more about Jesus and teaching about Jesus. A disciple is always striving to know Christ and show Christ. Discipleship is being in a loving relationship with God and in loving relationships with all people.

Even disciples who are growing and strong are tempted to shift their love and confidence from God to self. Peter trusted his own strength and denied Jesus three times. Growing and strong disciples are tempted to think they have all the answers and to exclude based on what they believe are God's commands. Peter excluded based on his understanding of God's food purity laws. Later, Peter realized that love always trumps the law. Peter realized he had fallen into the sin of self-righteousness as he saw the vision of the sheet filled with impure food items that God said was ok to eat therefore he was to welcome with love all regardless of what they ate.

A disciple makes choices, decisions and cast their votes in ways that reveal the most love for the greatest amount of people. A disciple is constantly entering into loving relationship with others and sharing about their loving relationship with God.

Second we are to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. St. Augustine said. "Baptism is a visible sign of what scripture proclaims. God's redeeming grace for all people." Baptism is God's grace forgiving us, cleansing us, healing us and welcoming us into loving relationship with God, and everyone. Baptism is God's grace that gives us cherished belonging to God's family.

Third we are to teach what Jesus modeled and taught. Jesus was always loving, welcoming, healing, including, forgiving, and loving. Jesus is love.

Fourth we are to remember that God is always with us. God has loved us, is loving us, and will always love us.

Church historians have noticed that about every 500 years the church goes through a major renewal. Over time the church slowly and subtly shifts its focus from loving all people to loving itself. The church becomes more concerned about preserving itself than giving itself away in love. Church members become more interested in what the church can give them rather than how they can serve the church and world in love. In worship, church members can become more interested in enjoying their style of worship than glorify God. Mission becomes more about making others believe like you do, rather than enabling them to discover their own unique relationship with God.

Many church historians believe we are at the pivot point of the 500 year renewal. There are an abundance of theories and opinions of how the church will be renewed and what it will look like in the future. Whatever forms the renewal takes on, I suspect the renewal will flow from grace and loving relationships with God and each other. This is God's church, and the Holy Spirit, through a loving relationship with each of us, will guide us into loving relationships with the world.

500 years ago the Reformers knew the world needed to experience God's love. They risked everything they had, even their own life, to reform the church and empower every Christian to share the love of God. Everyone is called and commissioned by Jesus to share the greatest spiritual gift which is love. This concept became known as the priesthood of all believers.

The Reformation is often referred to as the rediscovery of God's grace. Reformation leader, Martin Luther, had a deep sense of his sin but he realized that God's grace was even greater. God's love is so strong that nothing can separate us from God's love. Jesus came to prove that love. Jesus wants a loving relationship with each of us.

Luther realized that the hope of the world, people's deepest longing is to be in a loving relationship with God.

The Reformers reformed the church so more people could experience God's love. The Reformers insisted that worship services be in the common language of the people so everyone could learn of God's love for them and praise God for that love. They saw the Bible as God's love letter to us and started printing Bibles, giving them to people, and educating people so they could read the Bible. They realized that God loves everyone and sought to remove barriers and structures that would hinder a person's ability to directly experience God's love. The Reformers elevated the family and called it the household of faith. The family is where we should share God's love for us and our love of God. There is no greater gift we can give our family. Since God loves everyone, all belong by grace alone and everyone has been given special gifts and abilities by God then everyone is called by God to share God's love. We are the priesthood of all believers.

The Reformers succeed because they bathed everything they did with prayer. Martin Luther declared, "I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours per day in prayer" John Wesley believed that we can do nothing apart from the transformational power of prayer and also spent hours per day in prayer. Some Reformers compared prayer to oxygen, to breathe was to pray. The personal seal of John Calvin is a heart held by a hand which reflects his prayerful motto "My heart I offer thee, Oh Lord. Promptly and sincerely."

Prayer has tremendous power. Scripture tells of times when prayer changed God's mind. Jesus said prayer with faith moves mountains. Prayer often changes the person praying. Prayer is one of the principal ways God molds us into a loving person. Often God works through the one who prays to change the world. Moses prayed and prayed for the people of Israel. God formed Moses into a person with bold love. Do you think Moses had any idea of the amount of leadership, teaching, and nurture God would call him to do with the people of Israel when he prayed for them? How often do you pray for God's will

to be done here on earth? Every time you pray the Lord's Prayer you say "Thy will be done". It is the people who are praying that prayer that God will work through to bring about God's will.

God worked through the Reformers renewing the church with love, grace, prayer, and new technology. A controversial new device, the printing press, propelled the Reformation. There was great fear that printing books, giving people Bibles and educating the masses would make the church irrelevant. The fear was if people had a Bible and could read it then they would no longer come to church. Instead the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker and the common person began talking about God's love and grace in public, at work, at school at home and people longed for a deeper loving relationship with God so more people came to church. Perhaps a similar renewal is happening today through projected images, the internet, blogs, tweets, Facebook and podcasts.

The Reformers did not agree on many things. There was great controversy over baptism, adult or infant, sprinkle or dunk; what exactly happens in the Lord's Supper; is stained glass, even a cross, an idol, a graven image, that limits one's perception of God's love or enables it; some felt the organ was loud, distracting, expensive, hindered the pure worship of the singing voice, others were inspired to glorify God by the thundering organ; some embraced the new, contemporary hymns that many of the reformers wrote others were determined to only sing the traditional songs. The Reformers did all agree that everyone needs to be in a loving relationship with God.

John Calvin believed that the only matters that should divide a church are matters essential to salvation, the love and grace of God, all other matters should be discussed and differences respected. Growing up my Dad's favorite meal was beets and liver and onions. No one else in the family enjoyed this meal. However since we loved him we occasionally ate beets, liver and onions and did not complain because we knew it was his

favorite. My Dad did not care for my favorite meal either, lasagna, however because he loved me and wanted us to eat together as a family he ate lasagna.

The Faith Commission, Karen, Aaron, Liz, Carla and myself are striving to serve you your favorite worship meal however often your favorite, song, style, aspect of worship is someone else's least favorite. In the summer we celebrate our unity as one loving family of faith with one worship service. It is an opportunity for each of us to show our love for each other by glorifying God in ways that might not be our favorite, realizing that what we appreciate the least is the most needed and inspiring aspect to another. Often appreciating varied styles and another's perspective of God causes us to grow in love for others and God. All worship that glorifies God, celebrates grace and deepens love is wonderful worship.

John Calvin believed that our sin distorts God's image in us by bending our hearts, our love, back in on ourselves. Calvin's personal seal, his heart in his hand, reminded him to offer his heart and his love first to God and second to others. We are tempted to put our needs, desires, and wishes first. We are tempted to become self-focused. God made us in love to enjoy a loving relationship with God and each other, but, our sin bends that love back in on ourselves. A church can also distort its calling and start bending its love back in on itself. We are a church reformed, always reforming according to the Word of God and the call of the Holy Spirit. We need to prayerful consider if we are speaking the good news of God's love and grace in the language of the people outside this building, in our community, today? Are we celebrating God's grace or are we excluding some by our personal beliefs? Can we do a better job of using issues, art, technology, music, traditions and new innovations to help others experience God's love? Are we willing to welcome all people into the church even if they are different than us? If we strive to love all and welcome all that means we will likely find ourselves eating some liver and onions, worshiping, praying, serving, and listening to experiences of God that are not our favorite yet are another's favorite. Can the church do a better job of speaking the truth in love?

How can we help another experience the love of God? The apostle Paul explains how each of us is unique and is given unique gifts by God however love will bring us together.

Ephesians 4:12-16 “Our responsibility is to equip God's people to do God’s work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

When the world looks at the church are they amazed by the way we love one another and the world? Are they surprised by our ability to work together as brothers and sisters in Christ, to love and respect each other as we disagree, discuss tough issues and discern God’s will? Do our ministries inspire them to experience God’s love themselves?

My greatest joy as a servant of God is when God works through me to help a person experience God’s love. I am prayerful analyzing my ministry to understand how I can better help people deepen their loving relationship with God and how I can help those who have not yet experienced God’s love, experience God’s love and grace for themselves.

These words are inscribed on a tomb at Westminster Abbey: “When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world. As I grew older and wiser, I discovered the world would not change, so I shortened my sights somewhat and decided to change only my country. But it, too seemed immovable. As I grew into my twilight years, in one last desperate attempt, I settled for changing only my

family, those closest to me, but alas, they would have none of it. And now as I lie on my deathbed, I suddenly realize: If I had only changed myself first, then by example I would have changed my family. From their inspiration and encouragement, I would then have been able to better my country and who knows, I may have even changed the world.”

You are in loving relationship with God, therefore you already have the hope for the world, the solution to all our challenges and healing for all our ailments. Please share God’s love and you will bring hope to the world. Amen