

# “Keep Up the Hope!”

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FCMF #2

## Scripture

Mark 4:12-22

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

## Sermon

*Old John is dead, the poor man is dead!*

*Silly John, it seems he lost his head!*

Oh well that wild man, hollering in the wilderness, eating all the raw honey and bugs he could find - well it seems as if he finally ticked off the wrong guy.

Perhaps long before he had lost his head he had actually lost his mind?

All that ranting, alone in the wilderness, unwashed and unkept, it should have been a warning flag.

And of course his diet and his itchy clothes likely didn't help?

Truly, it is a sad thing to lose one's mind.

But it can happen if you're continually in a rage, raging against the machinery of injustice all the day long.

He felt called to correct injustice and convinced that God's Imperial rule would quickly eclipse even Rome.

He had seen a vision, illuminated in the dark, that a new religious movement would also soon replace the corrupt priesthood in Jerusalem!

His vision was complete with fire and battle axes, ready to cut down and consume all who would stand in its way!

“Even if I perish, the Anointed One will bring this to fruition!

And even if Herod snuffs me out, he cannot stop God!” he declared!

And Herod, oh brutal, brutal Herod!

He actually bestowed upon himself the honorific title, “King of the Jews!”

And on the backs of the poor he was able to build magnificent Palaces, Temples and cities for his own glory!

And though he was a Jew, he had long ago sold out completely to Rome.

And he was paid mighty handsomely for his services to Cesar, but in the end that was all he really was - a servant to the king, just a puppet on a string!

Oh he had money and he had power, power enough to have little baby boys killed and now even an unarmed baptizer.

He was a frightened little man, paranoid to lose what little power he had.

Fearful, paranoid and with an army at his command - what an unholy combination!

Like so many leaders before and after, he did have power power over those weaker than himself, but not powerful enough to extinguish the light of God’s eternal hope!

The cry of the Baptist is soon joined by the voice of Jesus!

Now to repent means more than just to merely, “make a change,” it means, to turn around, now, and to go in the exact opposite direction!

“You are going the wrong way!” says Jesus.

And since Heaven’s imperial rule is closing in - he would add, “you better turn around ASAP!”

But after hearing what had happened to John, one has to wonder if his retreat was not due some what to a more sober reflection upon the consequences of words?

But Jesus did return, from the wilderness, the place of John's madness saying some similar crazy things that had gotten John in to trouble.

Did he not understand, did he not get it?

What was it about possibly losing one's head did Jesus not understand?

How could he miss, "the memo" that speaking truth to the powerful does have its consequences!

But Jesus' vision was a bit different.

He came not as a warrior king with battle axes and fire but as a suffering servant!

Indeed, God has sent him to make things right but he came as a defenseless child, and his ministry affirmed by the sign of a dove descending upon him.

And yet we know, that there was also blood, suffering and pain.

Child birth, mass murders and eventually a cross to bear and to be borne upon.

Yet God's light and hope could not be stopped!

Oh he understood alright what he was getting into but that still did not stop him, and it could not extinguish his hope.

The antidote for fear, and hatred is here my friends - so drink it up!

"King of the Jews!" was Pilate's taunt, as if washing hands could purify anything, let alone his soul.

"I didn't really want to do it," he protested, "but what other choice did I have?" Order is paramount.

In the end Jesus did manage to keep his head, but his hands and feet and side were pierced!

And though his body may have finally given out, his spirit, his spirit was set free to shine, shine, shine!

The light, the light has come and continues to shine!

Hope, born through suffering and even death, cannot be shrouded or die!

Hope is born again and again and light pierces the darkness just like the lightning splits the darkest of nights!

Our own Anabaptist tradition goes back nearly 500 years.

Back to a time of religious revolution when simple folk simply started reading and studying the bible on their own.

And soon they started baptizing each other and refusing to obey city councils, governors and kings who had told them to stop.

And these Bishops, Kings and Councilmen were powerful men, full of insecurities and with armies at their disposal.

They too could certainly not let things get out of hand, and by any means necessary, maintain civilian order.

So they had to drown some, while others they burned at the stake.

Thousands more were imprisoned, tortured and sold into slavery, or banished from their homelands by good Christians rulers.

And yet more joined their ranks. Why?

In spite of suffering, torture, death and exile those first Anabaptists actually grew in numbers and finally spread around the world.

Did they not see what they were putting at risk?

Could they not figure it out, did they not understand the possible consequences for their behavior?

Last week we celebrated the life of a more recent Dreamer.

A dangerous dreamer who had dreams of full stomachs, social equality and economic justice.

But dreams we know can be dangerous not only for dreamers but for the powerful as well, who stand behind their billy clubs, fire hoses, and guns!

Ghandi, Malcolm, Martin and so many others, they knew, they knew what would happen.

They had all been warned and threatened many times - oh ya, they knew!

But they didn't stop? "Stupid fools!"

And yet still more joined the cause.

What sort of lunacy was this!?

It is the season of Epiphany, a period in the Christian calendar that last until Ash Wednesday when Lent begins.

It is a season where we proclaim that, "The light has come!" and that, "The light of God, expressed to us in the child Jesus, now shines in the darkness and that the darkness cannot and will never be able to overcome this light!

For unto us a child of Hope is born and this hope will never ever die!

Neither tyrants, nor presidents, nor armies, or death squads nor even the the local popo, can extinguish this light or kill its hope.

And get this - not even indifference will be able to prevail!

But have no illusions my friends!

Those who are afraid and armed, will give it their best shot!

Suffering, pain and even death will come, but the light and the hope will never dim.

So be also sure to take care of yourself!

Eat right, get plenty of rest and exercise!

Fast, pray and meditate regularly.

And come together as much as possible as a community for worship, support and accountability.

Take good care of yourself, take care of each other for we are in this for the long haul - we are in training for quite a great race!

Allow the light of God to reflect off of you and fully expect the light to illuminate those many signs of hope and faith around you.

What the world needs now, more than ever, is what the Church has always promised to be true: that the most valuable and powerful forces in our world are those of love, hope and faith.

So keep up the Hope folks!

Keep it up, share and receive it - for it is and will be this light that will help us and others, to find our way!

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