

What a month! I don't know if it is the economy and devaluation of our currency or just stress, but this month I feel like I only have 1 ½ cents to give. You know the saying, "you have to laugh or you will cry". I know a lot of people reading this right now feel the same way. To say that life the last few years has been "challenging", is a major understatement.

We are currently doing a sermon series; it started with appreciating the little things of each day even on those days where nothing seems to go right. Like just appreciating getting out of bed if that is the only thing you can do that day.

We took a long hard look at despair and realizing that there are times where we have no control over our circumstances. We need to give ourselves permission to just "be" in those times of grief, anxiety, depression, health issues etc. instead of trying to rush or fight it. As we know with all things, this too shall pass.

Sunday we looked at Hope and Faith and how each message is just like life, you can not encounter one thing and wrap it up with a neat little bow and be done with it. Each one bleeds into the next and is what shapes our journey.

Next week we will focus on joy and resiliency, but how do we get from grief and despair to hope, joy and triumph? For those who do not have a relationship with God or Jesus it is extremely hard to make the transition. However, as Christians we know that in life we will find ourselves in those times of hardships and while we may fall into a pit of despair, we know that we will not stay there because we have hope. Not just hope that things will get better, but hope in WHO will make them better.

Jesus said in this world you will have trouble, but take heart for I have overcome the world (and all of its troubles) John 16:33. He also said come unto me all you who are heavy burdened and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30 As Christians we are called to walk by faith not by sight (Corinthians 5:7), because we can not always see the big picture or how God is working all things out for good for those who trust in the Lord (Romans 8:28). That is where we find our refuge and strength in ever present times of trouble (Psalms 46:1). Knowing this deep seated truth above all is where Our Hope lies and why we as Christians can still have unbelievable JOY, even though we are far from always living in joyful circumstances.

This last week I ended on a comforting scripture from Romans 15:13 "May the God of HOPE fill you all with joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope". True joy can be obtained in the heartfelt gratitude and appreciation of God's love, mercy, forgiveness and grace!

I love this last scripture because it reminds us that knowing we would have times of trouble, God never meant for us to go it alone, he sent a helper to all who have received his Son as their savior. That's

right..we have the Power and comfort of the Holy Spirit with us constantly, guiding, directing, embolden, encouraging and reminding us that in those times were we have absolutely no control over our situation, we don't have to, because we can rest in the assurance that God's got this. The most crucial thing we forget is that through the body of Christ we are never alone, we have others there to help lift and comfort us when we need it most.

I want you to envision a glass half full of water. Most people will spend their focus debating on if it is half empty or half full, while ignoring the weight of that glass and its contents. If you were to hold that glass at first it seems pretty light. It's only half full, right? But the longer you hold it the heavier it becomes. In fact, pretty soon you are having to use your other hand to hold up your arm from the weight of the half empty glass. Hold it long enough and your arm will become shaky, your shoulder will cramp and scream, you will even lose grip of the glass.

This brings to mind the story of Moses who was instructed to hold his staff above his head when the Israelites were at war with the Amalekites. In our confirmation class we have finished Genesis and are now embarking on the life of Moses. I would encourage you to read Exodus 17. One, Joshua was asked to act out in faith, take some soldiers and go to war, the only way of winning was having Moses hold up his staff above his head. HmMMM doesn't seem like a great battle plan. But he does so in faith and obedience. As long as Moses arms are up they are winning but when they get tired, the staff droops and the battle shifts. His friends put a stone down for him to sit on, and then Aaron and Hur do what the body of Christ does best. They come along each side of Moses and held his hands steady until sunset and they won the war. See on his own even Moses buckled under the physical weight and pressure.

So what makes you think that you can do it alone? God never asked you to and that is why we not only have Hope, but Joy knowing that in our times of despair and trouble God has brought men and women alongside to lift us up and hold us steady until the sunset of our trial.

If you or someone you know is really struggling hear these words of encouragement and truth. **YOU ARE NOT ALONE!** Nor has God asked you to carry this burden by yourself.

My prayer for each of you is that if you are feeling a little shaky under the weight of your problem that God will surround you with others to hold you up. And if you find you are not in a valley right now, to ask the Lord who you can go give a lift.

Shalom,

Pastor Penny