

“Live for Something Bigger Than Yourself—A Community of Hope”

Isaiah 43:15–21, Romans 5:1–5

September 10, 2017

Rev. Dr. Jeong Park

Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

A month ago, Jacob, my six-year-old son, asked me a question. “Daddy, how did human beings begin to live on the Earth?”

I gently answered, “God created human beings!”

Then he continued, asking another question, “Daddy, why did God create human beings?”

I replied, “Because God so loved the world. He made humans beings like you and me out of His amazing love.”

Jacob seemed to be very surprised, and he asked me the following question excitedly, “Me and Daddy, too?”

“Yes. God created you and me with his love and hope. So you have God’s great hope and love in you!” I patiently responded.

Then Jacob added another question. “Daddy, did God create dinosaurs and robots, too?” I felt I was getting a little tired answering his never-ending questions. But when I saw his big eyes, I could tell he was enjoying asking questions. I hurriedly responded to tell him with these final words: “Jacob, God loves you and made you for a greater purpose in His hope. I hope that you will discover this as you grow up. You are special because you are part of God’s love and hope, and are always a precious child of God.” (One Sunday, Dedra encouraged Jacob to ask his daddy any theological questions he had during children’s time! Dedra—no offense meant! I’m just having fun!)

Just like the children, God has also given us the church, the community of faith, and hope. Our church didn’t begin randomly; we were made for God’s greater purpose in hope. *What is this hope?*

After Jesus proclaimed the good news, His disciples, especially through the Apostle Paul, established and organized a faith community with a program of worship and spiritual practices. We are people of God rooted in God’s grace and nurtured by love and fueled by hope! This is the church’s spiritual identity! This morning, I hope that we will find our church’s greater purpose as a community of hope.

I want to be clear with you about the definition of hope in Christian faith. In Christian faith, hope doesn’t merely mean “optimism” or a “positive attitude,” such as words of comfort like “I hope that you’ll feel better soon.” Rather, hope means spiritual aspiration and confidence in what hasn’t happened yet. In other

words, Christian hope is strong belief and faith in confidence, so that you never give up on hope but keep doing and believing until God makes it work. For example, when hate, violence, and a world at war threaten our lives and discourage us so that we might give up on God's goodness and purpose, we firmly stand in hope that these negative and harmful words won't be the final words. Instead, we believe that love is in the end stronger than hate and that it will ultimately prevail. Rev. Dr. Thomas, a professor at the Candler School of Theology, says that Jesus Christ himself is a gift of hope! We do not produce this gift of hope, but we find this hope in Christ Jesus. When God created us in His image, hope and love were already given to us. The people of God hold this hope and carry it out through the church's mission and ministries.

In today's Old Testament reading, the prophet Isaiah tells us God's hope in verses 18 and 19. He delivers God's words:

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (NRSV)

Last July, I shared Asian words of wisdom. "If you are depressed, you are living in the past. If you are anxious, you are living in the future. If you are at peace, you are living in the present." Here, the prophet Isaiah tells us God's inspiration, saying that we should let go of past things but cling to God in hope that He will do a new thing in us! He promises us that he will make a way in the wilderness and the desert!

Imagine any place of 'wilderness' and 'desert' in your life. ***What is your place of desert? Where is a place of hope for you that God will pour out 'water' into your 'desert' and make new life grow in you?*** God doesn't care about your former things or the things of old, but God deeply cares about you and wants to pour out God's hope on you, in his boundless care and love! Claim your hope! Turn your hearts to God and show your trust in Him and allow God to come into your hearts and do great new things in you! Have faith, and trust in hope!

What about our church and our community? Let us think about a 'desert place' and a 'wilderness place' in our community. Where are the places that need God's water and hope in our labor of service and outreach?

For my Acorn September letter, I wrote about my hope of creating small acts of kindness as projects for our community. What if we reached out every month with an invitation of fellowship and spread hope? Here is a list of 10 ideas:

1. Outdoor worship service (under the canopy of heaven) –September
2. Tongan Luau (Pacific Island cultural festival) –October

3. Thanksgiving harvest day/free children's day with Little Methodist School and our community – November
4. Student study center (open one of our buildings on Saturdays to students in our neighborhood for a quiet study space during their mid-terms or finals) – December
5. Fair Oaks United Methodist Church rummage sale – January
6. Social potluck/community-building dinner with a free children's program for single parents – February
7. Collect children's clothes from our congregation and give them away to our community – March
8. Collect e-waste, computers, and any electronic devices for recycling - April
9. Free tutoring and help with homework for kindergarten and elementary school children – May
10. Free music and a potluck social – June

The church is also called to be a place of hope, not only for surviving but also for transforming our lives and our community. As the Apostle Paul tells us in our second Scripture reading, "Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." I hope our Fair Oaks church will continue to dream God's dreams, do good, and keep planting and spreading hope within our community. This is what God wants us to do and to become as a community of hope! Let us boldly share this hope with our Fair Oaks Community. Amen.