

Ancient Advice for a Modern World: Hope in Times of Hardship

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2 Timothy 2:8-15

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I heard Coach Mike O’Cain

- tell a story this week about his childhood on the farm.
 - Now I don’t know if the story is true or not, - -
 - but he said that when he was a young boy,
 - his father was out one day
 - working the field closest to the road
 - with their old, blind mule - Daisy.
- As he was working, a car ran off the road and got stuck in a ditch near by.
 - The man in the car tried and tried to get his car out,
 - but finally gave up and came over to ask if he could get some help.
- Coach O’Cain’s father was happy to help.
 - He took the Daisy over
 - and hooked her up to the car.
 - Once everything was set,
 - he yelled, “Ok Max - pull.”,
 - then he said, “Ok Murray - pull.”,
 - then he said, “Ok Mabel - pull.”
- Finally he said,

“Ok Daisy - pull.”

- Daisy pulled

- and the car came out of the ditch.

- The driver was a little confused by the whole scene.

- He said,

- “Sir, thank you so much for your help,

- but I just have to ask - - You only have one mule, - -

- Why did you call out all those other names first?”.

“Well,” he said,

“if Daisy thought she had to pull that car out all by herself, - - -

- she never would have been able to do it.”

- It seems to me

- that there are times, - -

- when we all feel like we are pulling a heavy load,

- all by ourselves.

- Times when we can only see

- the problems that are mounting,

- the difficulties that lay before us,

- the road blocks that stand in our path. -

- We think there is no way,

- that we are going to be able

- to move forward.

- But the good news we hear this morning,
 - is that unlike Daisy,
 - we do have help
 - pulling that weight.
 - We do have help clearing the road blocks that
 - get in our way.
 - We do have help
 - overcoming the struggles of every day life.

For as it says in 2 Timothy this morning,

- “If we have died with [Jesus],
 - we will also live with [Jesus];”(2 Timothy 2:11)

- In other words, - -

- Being a part of God’s family of faith,
 - Being a follower of Jesus,
 - Being connected to Jesus’ life, death and resurrection,
 - through the waters of baptism,
 - means that you are never alone,
 - not now,
 - not in the event of trials and difficulties,
 - not even when we face death.

The new prayer at the beginning of our baptismal service says it this way,

“By water and the Word, God delivers us from sin and death

- and raises us to new life in Jesus Christ.
- We are united with all the baptized in the one body of Christ,
- anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit,
- and joined in God's mission
- for the life of the world." (ELW, pg. 227)

- In Baptism,

- God says - - -

- You are a member of my family forever.

- You are a part of this whole community of believers, called the church.

- You are given the gift of the Holy Spirit,

- that will blow through your life like the wind,

- giving you guidance, inspiration and help.

- You are a part of God's unending desire,

- to bring wholeness to a broken world. - -

- Which means that - -

- Thanks to the love of God,

- Thanks to the presence of Jesus in the world,

- Thanks to Jesus' triumph over death,

- Thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit,

- Thanks to the community of believers that gather for worship and prayer,

- Thanks to the service of God's people in the world, - -

- There is always - -

- Hope. - -

- Oh - I know that some mornings you may wake up,

- look at the day ahead,

- and think life is hopeless.

- There are so many bills,

- that they will never get paid.

- The illness you are facing,

- is rarely cured.

- The pain in your family,

- seems like it is going to tear your heart out.

- The task before you

- seems insurmountable.

- Your life seems to lack

- purpose or meaning.

- Well, the good news for us

- as children of God

- and as followers of Jesus

- is that even in the most desperate of times,

- there is always a reason to have hope,

- to believe that there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

- There is always a reason to have hope,

- to believe that nothing is impossible.

- There is always a reason to have hope,
 - to believe that the future can be bright.
- There is always a reason to have hope,
 - to believe that healing can come to a broken relationship.
- There is always a reason to have hope,
 - to believe that your life can and does have meaning and purpose.

There is always a reason to have hope,

- for we know the good news that
 - we live with God,
 - and God lives with us,
 - and God ultimately is victorious over everything,
 - even something as powerful and final as death.
- And so, - - - if God through Jesus has won a victory over death,
 - and God is always with us,
 - then it follows that we will always have hope. -
 - Hope - - the expectation
 - that things will turn around or get better,
 - Hope, the expectation
 - that a positive way forward will be discovered,
 - Hope, the expectation
 - that a new beginning is possible.
 - Hope that there is healing

- for those who are ill, -
- Hope that our sadness or loss
 - can be replaced by peace and joy, -
- Hope that our confusion and doubt
 - can be replaced by clarity and purpose.
- Now let me be clear,
 - I'm not saying that
 - Believing in God is some magical formula
 - that means you will never experience pain, brokenness or loss
 - in your life.
 - But I am saying
 - that the good news of God's love for us
 - means that we don't face pain, brokenness and loss alone.
 - I am saying that the good news of God's love for us
 - means that God through the presence of the spirit,
 - the words of Scripture,
 - times of prayer,
 - or the voices of a fellow disciples,
 - can help us to see options for our life,
 - when we think there are none before us.
 - I am saying that the good news of God's love for us
 - means that when we stop trying to do everything for ourselves,

- we suddenly realize that God is there
 - and has always been there beside us
 - to carry us through our time of need. - - -
- We live in a broken world,
 - where pain, brokenness and loss
 - are everyday occurrences. - - -
- The author of Timothy knew that reality in his life.
 - He says that because of his faith,
 - he'd suffered hardship and been chained up like a criminal. (2 Tim 2:8)
- Sadly,
 - each of us probably knows that reality in our lives as well,
 - but with God's help
 - with the victory of Jesus,
 - the presence of the spirit,
 - and the witness of all God's people,
 - We can know hope at any and every point in our lives. - -
 - Hope which will give us the strength we need
 - to face the pain and brokenness of this world. - - -
 - Hope which will open our eyes so we can see
 - the options and possibilities that are before us. - -
 - Hope which will help us discover a way forward
 - that leads to a more whole, healthy life

- in the sight of God.

- And while Daisy the mule,

- may have had to pull that car out of the ditch all by herself,

- the good news for us as children of God, - - -

- the hope we have as followers of Jesus,

- is that we never have to face the burdens of this life alone,

- for God will always be there

- to give us strength

- when we are weak

- to give us guidance

- when we are confused

- and to give us hope

- when we face

- pain, brokenness and loss –

- in too often

- touches our lives.