

³Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵**And hope does not disappoint us**, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

~ Romans 5:3-5 (NIV) ~



St. James Lutheran Church

living in
**HOPE &
PATIENCE**

2009 Advent devotional



St. James Lutheran Church

INTRODUCTION

Advent means coming. When something or someone is due to arrive, our hearts are stirred by hope and expectation. In this season we know that Christmas is coming, which generates hopes for celebrations and reunions and renewal. We are also reminded that Christ is coming again—and this time not as a helpless infant, but in glory and power. This Second Coming offers hope of redemption, the promise that all things will be made new.

Awaiting an impending arrival requires patience. Patience is that awareness that God's thoughts are not like our thoughts, and God's timetable is not the same as ours. Patience is the capacity to make the most of the waiting period instead of fussing and fretting.

These reflections by fellow members of St. James are offered as companions on your journey through the brief yet profound Advent season. In addition to reading these day by day, take some time to think and to pray and to converse with those you love on these fundamental themes of the faith we share.

A seminary professor by the name of Paul Holmer (no relation, but a true mentor) taught me that “hope is the capacity to rise to any occasion.” Hope is more than mere optimism, more than a lovely wish. Like her sisters, faith and love, hope has real power: power to sustain a wavering heart, power to endure daunting challenges.

A mother's hope for the child she carries in her womb enables her to persevere through all the stresses and strains of pregnancy and childbirth. A student's hope to be a heart surgeon strengthens him through the long nights and long years required to attain such proficiency. The hope of growing old together empowers husbands and wives to keep their vows and stick together through thick and thin.

Hope for a Messiah sustained Israel through some very dark stretches. Hope that Jesus was in fact that long awaited Messiah moved ordinary fishermen to drop everything and follow him. Hope that Christ will come again in glory to bring us home has empowered Christians for twenty centuries.

Hope is a spiritual gift we can ask God to give us. Hope is also a capacity we can develop in ourselves through discipline and in others by encouragement. Hope manifests its blessings in different ways in different people. Yet all our hopes have a common origin in the gracious goodness of our God.

Richard Holmer

Selected images of *hope* (+H), and its converse (-H)

- H: The morning after the first heavy frost of the fall: the frost has melted, revealing a desolate landscape of dark, twisted forms collapsed unrecognizably upon the ground, where once bright green foliage had proudly greeted the sun.
- +H: One lone rose has survived the hecatomb, modestly hanging its head, oblivious to its beauty.
- H: The days get shorter and shorter, darker and darker, until the darkest months arrive when, depending upon your schedule and where you live, your entire commute may be in the dark, the sun having virtually departed from your life.
- +H: In December little lights appear everywhere - on trees, on houses, on lampposts - gladdening the eye and bringing light into the darkness.
- H: Yet another cold, gray day; one lone tear rolls down the cheek of my semi-conscious husband; he is exhausted; he has tried so very hard, but he still cannot breathe on his own.
- +H: Two days later the sun shines on the Metrodome outside the window, and into Daniel's eyes, today tearing from the brightness of the light as he breathes and talks for the first time in a week.
- +H: God is with me every moment of my life, with every breath I take - and beyond life itself.
- H: The darkness and coldness of being separated from God has to be the abandonment of all hope, something so dreadful it is completely beyond comprehension.

Jineen Heiman

God is so good, and by raising Jesus from death, he has given us new life and a hope that lives on. 1 Peter 1:3

We often speak of our “hopes and dreams”. What we are really talking about is our life’s goals, achievements and wishes. I’d like that retirement with my wife in a log home on a snow-capped Colorado mountainside, and throw in a rushing stream below for good measure. Or maybe a lake-house or ocean-side home, instead. For many, hopes center around financial security, or career achievement and recognition. Whatever these hopes may be, they unfortunately end up being less than we expected. Our hopes of a Bears’ Super Bowl have been dashed to pieces in half the season. Another hope of a Cubs’ Pennant is gone ‘til next year. And even in the rare cases when we make the team, get the promotion, or finish the marathon, the satisfaction is fleeting and we realize that the hoping and wishing is often better than the “getting.”

By raising Jesus from the dead, God has provided us with an eternal hope. This is a hope that is more than our wishes or desires. This hope is built on a promise from God that cannot be measured in earthly terms. This hope is fact rather than dreams. It is a knowledge based in faith that Jesus died for our sins and was raised to new life so that we can share in that life. This hope never fades and never disappoints.

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for the gift of your Son, who in His death and resurrection has given us the hope that passes all earthly experience and understanding. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Tom Meyer

Monday, November 30, 2009

Hope

A few days ago my best friend and childhood neighbor's Dad was diagnosed with lung cancer. He never smoked and we are all very shocked. The family is experiencing anger, grief, fear, and shock. How was this not caught before it spread to the bone, the lymph nodes and other organs? Why is this happening? Sometimes hope is hard to have. Sometimes the odds seem so stacked against us that we are afraid to hope. Afraid that if we hope our disappointment might be worse. Afraid that we are being foolish and that we are not accepting reality.

In Matthew 4:35-41 the disciples find themselves on a boat in a horrible storm. One of the disciples wakes Jesus and says, "Teacher, don't you care that we're about to drown?" Jesus gets up and orders the wind and the waves to be quiet and everything is calm. Jesus asks his disciples, "Why were you afraid? Don't you have any faith?"

Jesus asks so much of us, that we have faith and hope even when the storms of life rage around us.

I then looked for a Bible verse about hope and found:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

We must always remember that because of the incredible power of God and Jesus, we always have a future. Through the gift of eternal life, we have been given a gift that gives us hope even during the storms of life. Even if the worst happens, we get the best from God. This combined with the many miracles of the Bible gives us all the reason in the world to HOPE!

Debbie MacAyeal

Tuesday, December 22, 2009

When we adopted Frankie five years ago, I did not realize that he would be a project. Set up a routine and the dog is happy, just like our previous huskies, I thought. Mike chose this dog because amidst the bedlam of the shelter, he watched us through the fence with his eerie light blue eyes and made no sound. Once we were home, we learned that this was an anxious and insecure dog. Frankie was destructive inside if left alone for even a short time. He whined incessantly if we left him in the outside kennel. So I was allowed to bring him with me to the office at St. James. He went under my desk and stayed there. One day he even squashed himself into a cardboard box under the desk.

Over time, though, Frankie came out from under the desk. He still didn't make a sound, but he came out and learned that when children visited, he got LOTS of treats. He became accustomed to the people coming and going. He moved from under my desk to the hallway in front of the library. People started to bring him treats and asking about him. He wagged his tail at Pastor Holmer and checked on him at lunch time. After several years, Frankie was approaching visitors and accompanying them along the hallways. How did we transform this creature? With love and patience. We cared for this dog and many of you did, too. We waited for Frankie to figure out that he could trust us. It took about three years.

God is patient with each of us in the same way—caring for us every day and waiting for us to figure it out. God never gives up on us.

Carol Bennett

Monday, December 21, 2009

“...and endurance produces character, and character produces hope”
Romans 5:4

The Advent season heralds the renewed hope that Christ brought to this world. It is coming together, a time to reflect and act upon our faith, as family and friends, to celebrate the warmth among us, even as the world grows cold. Here and there, shining through the crass commercialism of our age, one can discern a similarly informed light among the profusion of appeals for financial help, or the many ways we can simply *do* something (it *is* inspiring to see so many represented in our own Narthex). In Romans 5, Paul reminds us of the struggle embedded in the hope that Christ brought to the world, and this past year has surely seen its share of struggle. The metaphor of an endurance contest is strikingly reflected in Meb Keflezighi’s big win at the NYC Marathon last month. His life story inspires in many ways—an Eritrean refugee, immigrating to the U.S. 22 years ago, and now a citizen—his life story embodies endurance, faith, success in overcoming adversity, humility, real talent, and answering the call. This gifted man and brother in Christ challenges us all to work hard, and inspires us to endure. Thanks and praise to God for the renewed hope He sends us through all the workers He calls to His harvest.

Tim Goebel

Tuesday, December 1, 2009

The Hope of His People

“The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake; but the Lord will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel.”
Joel 3:16

There is no hope apart from Him; no hope in self to win against the devil! No hope in self to either be or do that which shall bless the world. But there is glorious hope for those who trust in Him. Jesus who is our Savior and King, the Living Head of the Body of which we are but humble members, “He is the Hope of His people.” He it is that “worketh in me both to will and to do.”

All I have to do is look around at the St. James congregation and I feel and know that “Hope” is alive. When there is a need within our church or outside of our church, we are all moved through Him to help, serve, support, preach, give, work, teach, sing, sew, cook, etc...

Thanks be to God!

Kathy Lowell

Wednesday, December 2, 2009

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

John 14:16-17

God's promises aren't fulfilled as quickly as we'd like. But God has always kept his promises. Abraham waited until he was 100 years old, and Sarah was 90, for the birth of the son God had promised them. God promised Abraham that his descendants would possess the land where he lived, but first they would be slaves in another land for 400 years. God promised to bless all people through Abraham's offspring, and St. Paul tells us this offspring was Jesus Christ, who was born more than 1,000 years after Abraham died. Abraham's patience was tried during his lifetime, and God's most important promises to him were fulfilled long after his death, in God's own good time. He has promised us the Holy Spirit to be with us forever, and his promise to us is as sure as his promise to Abraham.

Mike Bennett

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1

One of the joys of Advent is the quiet hope we see in the sleeping child. The Messiah did not appear with an army. He did not come proclaiming to all "HERE I AM." He arrived humbly, of humble earthly parents. For those expecting the Messiah to come in a more spectacular fashion, they did not see what they, for themselves, wanted. As Christians, we are sure of the promise of hope, given to us in a simple way. In the silent night of Jesus' birth our hope of being forgiven, and of being able to forgive others, arrived with peace.

Greg MacAyeal

Sunday, December 20, 2009

Let your hope make you glad. Be patient in time of trouble and never stop praying. Romans 12:12

Perhaps you have done this, too.

Have you ever faced a problem that is impossible for any human being to make go away, yet decided to give it the old college try, anyway?

The first time this happened to me, it took quite a while to finally give in and start praying. The problem did not go away, but praying made it easier to handle and gave me hope.

Since that time, I have learned to keep praying always, to be patient and to always remain hopeful. There is never a problem God cannot handle and He will help you through it.

With God, all things are possible.

Barb Basgall

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Romans 5: 1-2

Powerful words in that final sentence – REJOICE – HOPE – GLORY. The word REJOICE is so appropriate during Advent and leading up to our celebration of the birth of Christ. In that word I hear angels and choirs singing, I see beaming smiles on the faces of Christians everywhere; I feel a rush of excitement and happiness wash over me. The word HOPE epitomizes the Advent season. Throughout the Old Testament, God's people were in a constant state of waiting and hopefulness. Hope conjures up a picture of future possibility and promise – of Christians today on bended knee praying for deliverance from sin, fear, despair, suffering and mourning. It is a word full of optimism and trust and it requires a faithful heart. The word GLORY resounds with the magnitude and awesomeness of God. It is a word that singularly befits God and stirs up an overwhelming sense of the enormous gulf between God and our sinful selves...and then recognizes that God has closed that gulf through the resurrection of His son, Jesus.

Dear God – we REJOICE as your children in thanksgiving for the gifts you give us daily. Help us to carry the HOPE you offer out into the world as a shield and a banner until we meet you face to face at last in all your GLORY. Amen

Shelly Holmstrom

To quote the hymn:

“My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
No merit of my own I claim,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ the solid rock, I stand.
All other ground is sinking sand.”

The hope in my heart is eternal. Christ's sacrifice has conquered death and darkness once and for all. He loved me before I was a twinkle in my papa's eye. He gave his life so that I need never fear, but only believe. Believe him at his word...believe his Word. Always on this solid rock I stand, never alone.

My hope is a living entity. Living in me, living in my husband, living in my children, living in my church. He is as real and alive today as he was 2000+ years ago in Bethlehem.

Servant to all, he points the way to abundant life here and now. In a time when it's so easy to be cynical and fearful, my hope is in the perfect love that casts out all fear. This perfect love allows us to reach out in Christ's name.

When it is darkest, when I am weakest, my Hope is strongest. For only he is the solid rock, the rest is...well... just sinking sand.

And so with Paul:

“I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13

Donna Jarvi

False and True Hope

“...and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” Romans 5:5

I have been a fan of the Chicago Cubs baseball team for many years. Every year during spring training Cubs fans hope that this will be the year when our beloved team will make it all the way to the World Series—and win! When the baseball season ends in September and it is clear again that the Cubs’ championship hopes have been disappointed, loyal fans will join the refrain, “Wait till next year.” Then our lovable losers will finally become winners.

For over one hundred years the Cubs’ hopes of winning the World Series have been disappointed. Why is that? Is the team cursed by the goat, as some believe? Or is it a false hope that we fans have been clinging to, a hope built on the sinking sand of wishful thinking. Will the Ricketts family, who recently bought Wrigley Field and the Cubs for \$845 million, change that?

My Christian hope is built on a true and lasting foundation—God’s love for us sinners shown in the death and life-giving resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit this immortal love “has been poured into our hearts.” Therefore it is a true hope, based on divine assurance of forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation, not on mere human wishful thinking.

How and when do I experience this joyful hope? Most often during my daily devotional reading of the Word of divine promise in the Bible. With the aid of the Spirit, my faith in glorious things to come is confirmed. My hope is

Martin Luther once famously said, “everything that is done in the world is done by hope”.

Where does your hope lie in this advent season? As a kid, I can remember the one place my hopes centered during those weeks leading up to the big day: presents. Some Christmases my hopes were found under the tree, other times I wondered if my wish list got lost in the mail. Whether fully satisfied or disappointed, I got over it pretty quickly. In short, it wasn’t a lasting hope and it was a hope that could lead to disappointment.

The objects of my hopes as a kid pale in comparison to the Christmas gifts that we have already received and the one that we will someday possess. As followers of Christ, the hope that we have does not disappoint us, “because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” My hopes today aren’t set on gifts under that tree, but I hope that my eagerness, excitement and hope to receive them resembles that of the child who is expecting big things. Today I have put aside those childish hopes and instead seek to place my hopes in Christ. Not just during these weeks leading up to Christmas, but in every season and every thing.

Eric Holmer

Wednesday, December 16, 2009

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4: 6,7

This verse was a favorite of my mother-in-law, Chrystal Linn. She really did live her life, almost 90 years, in adherence to this admonition. At her funeral in June, we focused on these beautiful words, not only as a testament to her, but also as a comfort to those of us who mourned her. Knowing that she herself had told us not to worry was indeed a great comfort.

Advent is a time of waiting, which can sometimes be stressful and worrisome. But it is indeed a comfort to follow Paul's command to replace worry with prayer. In this way we may feel God's peace at this sacred time of year.

Anne Linn

built on God's love, not my own feelings. The Spirit of Christ opens to me the scriptures, and by faith I claim the joyful promises of God.

Dick Kaeske

Saturday, December 5, 2009

"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."

Romans 12:12

Recently, as I watched yet another news clip of soldiers arriving home in flag-draped coffins, I found myself thinking of all the hope that had been generated while they were "over there" in harm's way, the combined hope of family, friends, and of course, themselves. What happens next, now that the hope has come to a sudden end? Is it now transformed into its counterpart, despair? If we're Christian, do we allow that dark cloud to consume our souls? What has God given us to survive the deep pits of human grief?

The answers do not come instantly or easily. We must search for our despair survival kit. Searching hard enough, we will find that the kit is filled with faith, trust, patience, forbearance, acceptance and love. We need to sit back and "rest in the Lord" for awhile until glimmers of hope begin to emerge, until we begin to feel the "peace which passes understanding." Only then can we continue on "life's tempestuous path."

"Eternity is the divine treasure house
and hope is the window by which mortals
are permitted to see, as through a glass
darkly, the things which God is preparing."

William Mountford, 1816-85

Betty Albrecht

Sunday, December 6, 2009

“And his name will be called...” Isaiah 9:6

November’s end and December’s beginning can be a dreary, cold and rainy time when we regret the loss of autumn and already look forward to spring. In church time it is Advent. What better time to contemplate the dread and loneliness which is ours, to reflect on existential despair and the darkness of the soul?

Hope is the antidote to despair. The carol neatly sums it up: “The hopes and fears of all the years are met...” - met in a baby named Jesus. It’s in the name! Jesus means Savior. As a grown man Jesus called God “Father” and instructed us to call God “Father.” That is God’s name and he is our hope.

Our audacity to hope must not be compromised by liturgical pandering. It is theologically mistaken and psychologically destructive to address God in some new fashion. To impose gender changes neutralizes the power of God’s name. Political correctness makes God amorphous. Depersonalizing our Lord’s name diminishes our hope.

In the dark night of human despair angels sing and a star shines brightly. We hope to find peace in our own skin. We joyfully seek to become more like God, a God who knows us and calls us by name...a God who shares with us his name to call upon him whenever and forever.

Walter Hamester

Tuesday, December 15, 2009

Patience-An Elusive Trait and a Remarkable Gift

I am not known for my patience. Quick to move on, just about always in a hurry and ready for something different would be apt descriptions of my personality.

How blessed I am by God’s patience. And how ironically humbling it is that the God and creator of the universe would be patient with me:

- Patient when “in a blaze of light I wandered off to find where demons dwell” (Borning Cry)
- Patient for my return.
- Patient to teach me again what I knew from my youth.
- Patient when I neglect time in His Word.
- Patient for me to be all He wants me to be.
- Reaching out with His love, His direction and His people that I may follow Him and be filled with joy and peace.

Susan Jarzembki Holmer

Monday, December 14, 2009

As a senior citizen with HOPEfully many more years to live, I am focused now on helping my husband Fred live out his life with quality and dignity despite the progression of Parkinson's disease. My HOPE is that he can stay at home where I can attend him. However with his loss of balance, if he broke a leg or hip, that would change.

After nearly 20 years with PD, Fred still has his phenomenal memory, the joy of knowing our two daughters, their spouses and the four grandchildren are thriving, and the satisfaction of staying in our own home of 44 years. It has been **"grace upon grace" John 1:16**; we have been blessed with miraculous happenings: Witness how after 30 plus falls with numerous scrapes and bruises, cracked ribs and pelvis, crushed vertebrae, he is still ambulatory and has not been hospitalized. After every single fall we have said, "Thank you, God" that it wasn't worse. His PATIENCE in healing teaches all of us PATIENCE.

Soli deo gloria.

Donna Fortney

Monday, December 7, 2009

Advent

Advent means the coming of Christ. We celebrate the first coming of Christ when God sent his Son to us as a baby boy born to humble parents, in a manger setting, during turbulent times. This event gives me hope.

"For to you born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."
Luke 2:11

To me hope is divided into two main parts:

Part 1 of hope—something wonderful has happened.

For over two thousand years, Christians all over the world have celebrated the birth of Christ with great joy. We celebrate in many ways: the lighting of the candles on the four Sundays of Advent, the Christmas pageants, the devotions, special services and concerts, to name a few.

Part 2 of hope—the belief that Christ will come again and that we will be reunited with all those who have gone ahead of us through death and into heaven.

My granny was an exceptional example of this belief. Each day she held devotions, she prayed for family, friends and those who needed help including the presidents of the U.S.A. She also prayed for those who had passed away. She lost many of her family tragically, but she never lost hope. When facing death, she didn't fear it. With a smile, she told us we would be together again.

"Hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts."
Romans 5:5

God's Son, Jesus Christ, and eternal life are God's greatest gifts to us. To me, hope is the powerful message of my faith and I couldn't live without it.

Mary Gram

Tuesday, December 8, 2009

Most of us have had the experience of losing our patience. When you lose your patience, where does it go? We know what happens when you lose your temper—it goes up on flames! What becomes of patience when it is lost?

Can patience simply vanish all together—or is it just misplaced for awhile? And what causes patience to disappear? Is it something in the person or persons with whom we are frustrated—or is it more likely something in us?

Once it dawns on us that we have lost our patience (as we occasionally lose our keys or our sunglasses), where should we look to find it again? It's not in a coat pocket, and you won't find it under the sofa cushions. Patience won't be found when other people suddenly begin conforming to our expectations.

Patience is discovered when we recall life's most basic guideline: treat others the way you would like to be treated. All of us would like to be treated with some measure of patience. And the sure place to locate the patience we are missing is in the loving hands of the One who is infinitely patient with each of us. God's grace reminds us to aim to be as patient with sometimes difficult persons as God is with sinners like us.

Jim Bar Zebedee

*You millions, I embrace you.
This kiss is for all the world!
Brothers, above the starry canopy
There must dwell a loving Father
Do you fall in worship, you millions?
World, do you know your Creator?
Seek Him in the heavens!
Above the stars must He dwell.*

I keep Christmas cards for about a year, and this morning I looked through them again. Recurring words found in these cards include: joy, friendship, happiness, belief, merry, peace, love, health, faith, thanks...and hope. Through Jesus Christ we obtain the strength and experience the hope to achieve the attributes we desire.

We pray, we wish and we hope.

Detlef Koska

Sunday, December 13, 2009

Living in Hope

Being a parent has blessed me with the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the world through my children's eyes – a very hopeful view. Whether it's the anxious waiting for Christmas morning, the presents under the tree and the tiny reindeer hoof prints in the snow outside the house or even the unbridled optimism of my juvenile Cubs fans that "this is the year", it is this sort of confident expectation that the Bible means by "hope." It's not just a wish – it's an ardent belief. As Christmas approaches, we all can celebrate the Hope that is the expectation of Jesus' arrival but beyond that and more importantly, we, as Christians, can live in the Hope that is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our everyday lives and celebrate the Hope of the resurrection of Christ and the promise of eternal life.

Rob Davis

“Ode To Joy” – Hope Prevails

I was in Berlin in August of 1989, and the discussions with friends focused sooner or later on the Wall and for how much longer it would survive. I stated: “Probably another 20 years. I can only hope I am wrong!”

November 9th, 2009 was the 20th anniversary of the “collapse” of the Berlin Wall, after it had separated that city for 28 years. Over 128 people had lost their lives in their failed attempts to cross the Wall. Countless others were arrested and sent to prison. Well, the rest is history...hope had prevailed.

On this day in a statement of unity and peace, leaders of the world headed by Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Russia’s President Dmitry Medvedev, France’s President Nicolas Sarkozy, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and many others marched through the Brandenburg Gate....hope had prevailed.

A few weeks after the “collapse”, on Christmas Day in 1989, an international group of musicians played Beethoven’s 9th Symphony, the “Ode To Joy” conducted by Leonard Bernstein in the Berlin Opera near the Brandenburg Gate. The musicians came from German Choruses, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Kirov Theatre, St. Petersburg, London Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris...a clear demonstration that people of different nations can sing and play together... a celebration of human freedom and unity.

The fifth verse in the 9th Symphony (The Ode was written by Friedrich von Schiller in 1785) consists of these powerful words:

"When Christ at a symbolic moment was establishing His great society, He chose for its cornerstone neither the brilliant Paul nor the mystic John, but a shuffler, a snob, a coward--in a word, a man. And upon this rock He has built His Church, and the gates of Hell have not prevailed against it.

All the empires and the kingdoms have failed, because . . . they were founded by strong men and upon strong men. But this one thing, the historic Christian Church, was founded on a weak man, and for that reason it is indestructible."--"Heretics" G.K. Chesterton

The older I get, the more cause I have to despair over my own sin and weakness. Hope lies in observations like Chesterton's. God will make more of us than we can ever hope for, if we let Him. Hope is a virtue of experience; innocence doesn't know enough moral failure to need hope. When failure teaches how unreasonable it is for anyone to be saved, you learn the virtue of hope. As Chesterton wrote elsewhere, "Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all. . . . Exactly when hope ceases to be reasonable it begins to be useful."

Andrew Rosa

Thursday, December 10, 2009

We wait in hope for the Lord;
he is our help and our shield.
In him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in his holy name.
May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord,
even as we put our hope in you.

Psalms 33:20-22

Hope is such a powerful word. Everyone has hopes. There are small hopes...I hope it doesn't rain. I hope my team wins the game. I hope I am on time. There are also big hopes...I hope it isn't cancer. I hope that I am a good friend, spouse, parent, child... I hope that I am living my life the way that God wants me to live it. Doesn't that put all of the other hopes in perspective? God is there for the small hopes and the big hopes. Putting our hopes in God allows our hearts to rejoice.

Hope & Rejoice!

Kim Opsahl

Friday, December 11, 2009

As a prisoner of the Lord, I beg you to live in a way that is worthy of the people God has chosen to be his own. Always be humble and gentle. Patiently put up with each other and love each other. Ephesians 4:1-2

Paul didn't mince words in his instructions to the Church at Ephesus. Among other things, Paul begs the congregation to "**patiently**" put up with each other and love each other. Human nature hasn't changed much

since that time. Patience is still in short supply in our own congregation and in our daily lives.

From the time we get up in the morning to the moment we fall asleep at night, we are constantly judging the actions of those around us. "Why didn't they handle this the way I would have handled it?" "What is taking them so long to get this done?" "How could somebody say that to me?" "Why didn't that person thank me for my efforts?" It goes on and on.

Our constant lack of patience with each other results in actions that are definitely not worthy of "the people God has chosen to be his own." We complain of other's actions or lack of action behind their back; we harbor resentment and hurt feelings against each other; we pull away from members of our family, our friends, neighbors and fellow church members. We leave the congregation, finding it easier to walk away than to forgive fellow members for their shortcomings, real or imagined. We easily blame others for our actions, and just as easily forget Paul's directions to the Church in Ephesus to "**patiently**" put up with each other and love each other.

What a different person, family, congregation and world we could be with such patience. Paul takes it a step further. Not only should we "put up with each other", which is difficult enough to do, we should love each other. If love were our first response, patience would certainly follow.

Heavenly Father,

Instill in us the patience that you require of your chosen people. Help us to make love our first response to those around us who may try our patience, cause us pain, or bring us to anger. Cause us to be humble and gentle in our dealings with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Tom Meyer