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UNSWERVING HOPE Michael B. Beough
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Our fifth Bedrock Belief says, "God gives us hope." I call this one of our "unshakeable anchors" in life. When the storms of life hit, this anchor keeps us from going adrift and running afoul of the reefs of hopelessness on which we founder.

It would be tempting to try to convince you of the importance of hope, but I think everyone of us knows that already.

The power of hope is in its ability to keep us playing the game.

Take a game like Candy Land, for instance. Why play the game? Because of the hope of winning and because my grandson asks me to play. When we start the game, both of us believe we are going to win. I have noticed something about my grandson. Sometimes he plays only as long as he thinks he has hopes of winning. If I get far ahead, he might suddenly lose interest in the game. Just as likely, he will start making up new rules that tend to favor him. One of the things I try to teach him is to keep playing even if you are not going to win. Just finish the game.

Something else I have noticed. When I am far behind, he tells me, "Pops, you might still win. You could get the lollipop." The lollipop, of course, lets you move almost to the finish line. He tries to give me hope because he knows the power of hope and that I don't like losing any more than he does.

The power of hope is in its ability to keep us playing the game, and playing is fun as long as we have hope.

Our Bedrock Belief speaks of the importance of hope, but it goes deeper than that. It says that for us our hope comes from God. The emphasis falls on God as the provider of hope. God gives us hope. Because of God we always have hope of winning. We are never out of the game. Or to put it another way, we will never give up on God because God never gives up on us. As the writer of Hebrews 10:23 says, *Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*

A minister in Houston told this story about hope. He saw a picture once of an old burned-out mountain shack. All that remained was the chimney...the charred debris of what had been that family's sole possession. In front of this destroyed home stood an old grandfather-looking man dressed only in his underclothes with a small boy clutching a pair of patched overalls. It was evident that the child was crying. Beneath the picture were the words which the artist felt the old man was speaking to the boy. They were simple words, yet they presented a profound

theology and philosophy of life. Those words were, "Hush child, God ain't dead!"

The minister said, "That vivid picture of that burned-out mountain shack, that old man, the weeping child, and those words "God ain't dead" keep returning to my mind. Instead of it being a reminder of the despair of life, it has come to be a reminder of hope! I need reminders that there is hope in this world. In the midst of all of life's troubles and failures, I need mental pictures to remind me that all is not lost as long as God is alive and in control of His world."

God gives us hope, and we want to say, "Like nothing else can." Psalm 146:3-5 says,

*Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save.
When their spirit departs, they return to the ground;
on that very day their plans come to nothing.
Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD his God . . .*

Of course, we put our hope in princes all the time. We are hoping that the next president will get us out of our economic woes and find a way to end wars. We put our hope in the stock market. We hope our doctors will cure us. We hope the person we marry will make us happy. Princes and mortals play important roles in our hopes for the future.

But the only sure hope is God. Our only sure hope is in the ways of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Lamentations 3:22-24:

*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."*

Are you facing a great trial? Take heart. Put yourself in God's hands. Wait for His timing. Hope in God.

Our Bedrock Belief says God gives us hope. It also says God gives us the right kind of hope, the good kind of hope, that empowers us to keep playing the game.

The game we are playing is for keeps. The problem is that a lot of us are playing for the wrong prize. The things we hope for fall far outside of God's promises. God promises to give us the victory of a redeemed life, a transformed life, a fully just life, an eternal life in heaven not made with hands. Around here we call it the peace, purpose, and promise of God. A lot

of us are playing for the booby prize. We are going for the consolation prize but it is no consolation. When the going gets tough, we have no hope to fall back on. When we play for the wrong prize, our lives never rise to the heights of the glory for which we have been created. We hope in the wrong things.

Disciples of Jesus have an inside track on the right kind of hope. I don't know how you can follow Jesus and grow in discipleship without brimming over with hope. The more you get to know him, the greater your hope because nothing is impossible through him. That is why our mission is to make and grow disciples of Jesus Christ who give their lives to make a difference in the world. We want others to experience the hope we experience in Jesus Christ so God can use them to make a difference in the world.

In Hebrews 10:24-25, after encouraging the Christians to hold fast to their hope, it says, *And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.*

Followers of Jesus are hope-builders. Our mission team will rebuild homes, paint schools, etc. in New Orleans. But they will also bring hope. They will make hope happen.

In South Africa, Joyce Hollyday, activist and Emory University professor, often asked people she met if they thought apartheid would end in their lifetime. "Not in my lifetime," was a common answer. "Probably not in mine or my children's" one older woman added, "but perhaps in their children's."

A 10 year old in the township of Mamelodi, outside Pretoria, was more hopeful. He was sure that he would live to see an end to the system of racial segregation. When Joyce asked if he thought his children would grow up without apartheid, he answered, "I will see to it."

"I will see to it."

That's the spirit of Biblical hope. That's the spirit of our Bedrock Belief. We live under the umbrella of hope. We are confident that if we follow Christ, God will change us and use us to make a difference in the world.

We live in the hope of a guaranteed outcome – a future defined by the grace and justice of God and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This kind of hope gives wings to our feet. It gives us the courage of a child who dares to answer, "I will see to it."

As a congregation, we are committed to seeing to it. What we hope for we are committed to making happen by the grace of God. I love what the

prophet Zechariah says in Zechariah 9:12 about the people of his day. He is writing to those who were literally in captivity in Babylon for 70 years, but are now home again in Jerusalem. Hear what he wrote: *Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.* "Prisoners of hope." They never gave up. And so he calls them "prisoners of hope."

And so are we.