

**Rediscovering Hope
Rev. Tony Lorenzen
Pathways Church
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"Great ideas, it has been said, come into the world as gently as doves. Perhaps then, if we listen attentively, we shall hear amid the uproar of empires and nations, a faint flutter of wings, a gentle stirring of life and hope.

- Albert Camus

The story of Pandora's Box teaches us that Hope is a Gift. A Gift from the Gods. So it was in Greek mythology and so it is classical theology. The Cardinal Virtues are acquired by practice - you become just by practicing justice, you become wise by exercising wisdom, but the theological virtues of Faith Hope and Love, those are gifts. You can't acquire them through practice, they are divinely bestowed – on everyone, from the get-go. They're always there. Sometimes they have to be re-discovered. Hope is just about the biggest package of grace there is, because it lets us hold on, find a way, make it through. Hope is the virtue of

not giving in or giving up. Hope isn't audacious so much tenacious.

There's a lot that can make us want to give up. I do not understand how the most powerful country in the history of the world, the richest country in the history of the world let millions of people live in a state of homelessness or let anyone go without basic healthcare or pass laws that will allow law enforce to stop people an question their immigration status because they "look" like illegal immigrants. Do I look illegal? Do you? I don't get it. I will probably never get it. Hopeless?

Why is our nation so obsessed with fossil fuel? With refusing to make the environment a national priority and take on oil companies (you have seen what's going on in the Gulf with this BP oil spill right?) and car companies. We need a jobs program on the scale of the Works Progress Administration or the Civilian Conservation Corps right now. Changing our infrastructure over to a sustainable energy infrastructure would a lot of people to work. I don't get it. Hopeless?

I don't know about you, but I find near impossible to stick with a diet and exercise plan, and no matter what I do it really all does go back to my father. Do you have things and relationships you just can't seem to resolve? Hopeless.

There is plenty in life that seems hopeless enough. And yet, and yet, hope is always there. It's a gift. Hope is not a way out, but a way through. My ethics teacher Jim Keenan said that Hope isn't about escaping life's difficulty, but finding a way to survive what gets us down. In his book, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians*, Keenan writes:

"The presence of hope is not bombastic or crude or rattling. It does not suddenly change our darkness into light nor does it turn our silence into eloquence. Zephyrlike, hope is subtle. It respects our freedom, our intelligence, our emotions. Hope does not drive out our critical thoughts, our deser-like experiences, our deep-rooted fears. Rather, hope enters us gently, assuring us of the presence of the Spirit in the midst of turmoil" VFOC pg 46).

Hope is a gift. We rediscover it. You know how people will tell you not to lose hope? They won't tell you, "Hey go find some hope, but don't lose hope, right? That's because it's already

inside you. Remember the Grinch who stole Christmas?

Remember how the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day? Remember how he found the strength of ten Grinches plus two? It's like that. Every story you've ever heard of someone who had every right to quit and didn't. Every time you heard of that team that had every right to throw in the towel and accept defeat but didn't. Every time you found a way to take one more step, show up one more time, give something one more try. Sure you willed yourself through it. But what made you believe you could? Hope.

You know every story of making it out of some horrible circumstance, of overcoming huge obstacles, of jumping high hurdles has in common? Recognizing and understanding the reality of the situation that's staring you down. Accepting that you're up the river without a paddle and then, well, not accepting it.

Parker Palmer puts it this way in *A Hidden Wholeness*: brokenness is a part of life. He says, "wholeness does not equal

perfection: it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life. Knowing this,” says Palmer, “gives me hope that human wholeness – mine-yours, ours, need not be a utopian dream, if we can use devastation as a seedbed for new life” (5).

Parker Palmer is tough. He doesn't let you escape from...yourself. Parker discovers hope in listening to his own heart. Basically, the landscape he paints in his book *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* is one where Hope is found in a deep conversation with yourself.

He writes:

“Every time we are conflicted between inner truth and outer reality, it becomes harder to forget or deny that we have an inner teacher who wants to lay claim to our lives” (19).

I want you to rediscover Hope. I want you to be in conversation with your inner teacher and with others because it is only through these difficult conversations that we come out on the other side to the light of day. Hope enables us, as James Keenan

says, to “continues a dialogue even in the face of our greatest fears” (45)

I want you to rediscover hope by forging relationships with people who are different from you.

International conflict mediator John Paul Lederach says we don't create peace by convincing people we are right, but by forging unlikely and genuine relationships. Next time you're losing hope, think of this. Restore your relationship with yourself. Make friends with someone unlike you. We don't create peace by convincing others of the rightness of our argument, but by making friends across unlikely boundaries.

I create peace, and I rediscover hope when I love my enemy, when I love the other, and when I make friends with someone that the world says can't be my friend. When I reconcile with someone my head tells my heart that I can't reconcile with.

John Paul Lederach calls these relationships unlikely alliances and when we come into unlikely alliance with what was

once thought impossible we rediscover hope where once was hopelessness.

When I am housed and I forge relationship with the homeless, I rediscover hope. When I am white and I forge relationship with black and brown, I rediscover hope. When I am Christian and I forge relationship with Atheist, I rediscover hope. I love the word forge. It's a blacksmith-y word. It's not what a potter does with clay, all about molding and shaping and turning. Forging is a difficult, hard working word, full of banging and slamming, and re-firing and banging some more to see if you got it right. Slowly hammering the interaction and connections and brief similarities and vast differences into ways forward. Forging a separate you and me into a we. Forge, that's how we build relationships - hopeful, tentative, otherness filled relationships.

We will not find hope, or the end to conflict, in the facts and figures and the convincing of arguments. We will not end the conflict in the Middle East, or the debate on Gay Marriage or Illegal Immigration, or even the existence of God with our data

and our history and our briefs and our white papers and we certainly won't end the conflicts with our violence, be it physical or verbal. Hope is a matter of the heart, not the head, and it must be treated as such.

We will rediscover hope by forging relationships with immigrant communities and Israelis and Palestinians and people of different politics, and it will be difficult and messy and by sharing life together, we find not a way out, but a way through.

I want you also to rediscover hope from the religious abuse of the past. It's a common thing. Religious abuse follows the pattern of other abuse. You grow up with religious intolerance, then run away from it, then in the bizarre pattern of the abused begin to practice it yourself, demonstrating intolerance for anyone who doesn't think or believe just like liberal, open minded, progressive you. Maybe, sometimes, you're even very nasty and angry and rude towards people with beliefs that aren't so open minded and tolerant as yours. It's not an uncommon UU thing. Maybe we can begin to create a place that really helps people to

heal from religious abuse. We can forge – there's that blacksmith-y word again, forge a place where the language and practice of reverence is celebrated and yet at the same time resources are gathered to help those who have been hurt and scarred by religion in their past. I don't just have hope that we can do this, I know we can.

I know this because we have a mission here: to build a spiritual community that changes lives. This is not only our great mission, but our great hope and our great strength. Our mission is not to build a social club, although I too love times when we gather for fellowship to socialize. Our mission is not to build a political organization, although I believe my spiritual values call me to engage politically in the world. Our mission is to build a spiritual community that changes lives - this is the source of our hope and our fellowship and the root of our social justice mission.

Doing spiritual work is dangerous and elusive. We forge spiritual relationship with ourselves, the way we forge relationship

with others, step by step, carefully, sometimes we pound it out, shape and reshape it.

Parker Palmer says that soul is shy, and that it seeks safety in the underbrush when others are not around. This makes sense, especially for those of who have been spiritually wounded or abused in previous encounters with religion. That's why Palmer speaks at great length and we use a model in our Wellspring groups here of what he calls a Circle of Trust – a place where we are alone together. Where we can find hope by finding our souls, our inner voice, our true self, as we listen to it speak, and others listen without correcting, fixing, or setting each other straight.

Parker says *“Unfortunately community in our culture too often means a group of people who go crashing through the woods together, scaring the soul away. In spaces ranging from congregations to classrooms, we preach and teach and assert and argue and claim and proclaim, admonish and advise, and*

generally behave in ways that drive everything original and wild into hiding” (59).

Our hope, the greatest hope we have I believe is, as Parker Palmer says, “learn how to sit quietly in the woods with each other and wait for the shy soul to show up.” We know that this is our mission at Pathways, to build a spiritual community that changes lives and that creating spaces where we can sit quietly with each other is the major way we do it.

Some of you out there have been through things that makes the rest of us wonder how you go on: whether it is a surgery, the loss of a child, an illness in your family, financial trouble, job loss, raising children, various types of addictions and abuse, war, homelessness, violence. How, how did you survive? We might ask. I don't know, you might answer, I just found something inside myself. That last bit that's inside us, the last thing left in the box – that's called hope. It's always there if you go looking for it. It's a gift. And yet I know this, I know that while you went through these difficult things, others here sat quietly in the woods with you

without trying to change you, fix you, or set you straight. For two years now I have watched us build a spiritual community that changes lives one clearing in the woods at time. So don't just hope we can do this, I know.

So let us be quiet and thoughtful, prayerful... for a minute and get started again on the rediscovering of hope. Let's find the hope that's inside us. For some of us, it may be easy to locate, for others it may be buried somewhere, lost in the corner, the last thing left like Pandora had in her container, but I know it's there.

We'll all need to listen to our inner voice and to each other, often. But take courage, Listen to your heart, listen for your soul, listen... there it is...in the quiet.....hope. Got it? You've discovered it, again, yes? It's a good gift.