

“Hope, Week 3” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
December 17, 2017 Third Sunday in Advent
Sermon Series on Hope

Let us pray: **Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.**

This week, we continue our sermon series on hope. Today will be the third in that series. Today is also the third Sunday in Advent, a time of preparation to welcome the baby Jesus. Not only are we waiting for Jesus’ birth and all that means to the world and you and me, but we also are waiting in hope and with eager anticipation for Christ’s return to bring peace on earth. We wait for Christ’s return when he will establish his kingdom on earth, when Christ will eliminate war, hunger, and wipe every tear away.

Hope is important, so how can we increase our hopefulness and become less fearful, more motivated, more able to dream and capable of making a difference in this world? The sermon series is covering seven factors that each of us can use in our lives to increase our hopefulness. Paying attention to each of these factors in our lives will enable us to be more hope-filled.

Last Sunday we looked at the first of these factors that raise your hope: Recharge your batteries. You can’t be hope-filled if you are out of fuel in your life. Keep your life fueled and full of hopeful energy. We looked at 5 things you can do to keep your batteries charged: invest in your own growth, understand the power of worship, unleash the power of the Bible into your life, build great relationships and pay attention to whose voice you are listening to – listen to Jesus’ voice.

This Sunday we’ll be looking at the second hope factor: raise your expectations. We will examine five attitudes and actions that will help you become a person who expects great things.

Jesus says: **“With God all things are possible.”** (Matthew 19:26) Do you believe what Jesus says? Jesus also said, **“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”** (John 10:10) Do you believe Jesus?

On Friday evening, Linda and I attended a showing of Lawrence of Arabia, a film that in 1962 won the Academy Award for best picture. The film details the exploits of Lawrence, a British soldier, when the British were fighting the Turkish government in the part of the world that is now Saudi Arabia, Israel, Jordan and Lebanon. It seems that Lawrence didn’t think anything was impossible and accomplished the impossible. Lawrence definitely raised his expectations and the expectations of those around him.

Lawrence’s life illustrated **the first trait of a hopeful person: believe impossible things are possible.** No one thought Lawrence could do what he did, because no one thought them possible. But Lawrence thought them possible – and his possibilities became realities.

You and I do have to be careful not to fall into the habit of saying: things will never change. These words replace confidence with cynicism, high hopes with depression and despair. These four words blind people to the possibility that God might have better days ahead.

These four words are powerful. Do you remember that Jesus did not perform any miracles in his hometown? What was the reason? Matthew 13:58 says: **And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief.** The people in Jesus' hometown remembered the boy Jesus and didn't believe that Jesus could be anything more than a carpenter's son.

So, start believing that impossible things are possible. If you don't, then you're going to get what you expect.

The second trait: believe that God has better days ahead. Do you believe that God has better days ahead for you?

There's a story about a town in Maine that was going to be at the bottom of a lake once a dam was completed. The people of the town were paid for their homes and told they could live there until the water rises making their homes inhabitable. A writer visited the town about a year after the dam was completed. The water hadn't gotten to the town yet, but there was a remarkable change in the town. The tidy homes with well-kept yards had become what we would call a slum today. No one fixed their broken windows or their blown down fences. No one worried about trimming the bushes or keeping the lawn manicured. Why bother? The town would be submerged.

There was no faith in the future in that town. Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present.

God has better days ahead for you. Believe it and become more hopeful.

The third trait: realize the power of perspective. I remember hearing long ago about a gas station attendant who was filling the gas tank on a car. It was a long time ago! The people in the car told the station attendant that they were looking for a place to settle. The station attendant asked the people about the town they came from. Those in the car told them the town they were leaving wasn't a very good place. The people were not friendly, the schools were terrible. The attendant then told the people in the car that this town was much like the one they left and they would probably not be happy here.

Later that day the gas station attendant was filling another car. The people in that car, like the ones in the first car I mentioned, told the attendant that they were looking for a place to settle. However, when the attendant asked about the town they were leaving, their answer was markedly different from the first car. The people in this car said the town they were leaving was friendly, the schools were great, neighbors helped neighbors. The attendant told the people in this car that this was the town for them to settle in. They'd find the town and the people much like the town they left.

Different perspective, different results.

For those of you who follow football, you know that one man, Vince Lombardi, took a team that lost 70% of the time and turned it into a championship team that claimed five national championships including the first two Super Bowls.

One man changed the perspective of a losing team into the perspective of a winning team.

There a powerful example like this is the Bible. Nehemiah showed up in Jerusalem only to find a bunch of quarreling, hopeless folk. The wall around the city had been torn down 92 years earlier. The people living there had been stuck in a town without the security a wall around the city brings. Nehemiah arrived on the scene with a new perspective on what could happen. After 92 years of failure, in 52 days the wall was rebuilt, and the town had a different perspective.

I've seen a change in perspective in this church that has led to a more hopeful future.

Most of us are waiting for a change in our lives, in the way we live, but what we may really need is a change in perspective. Often, it's not our circumstances that are keeping us hopeless, but it's our perspective.

The fourth trait: replace fear with faith. The Bible story of David and Goliath is an example of replacing fear with faith. The Bible tells us that the Hebrew army was afraid of Goliath and the Philistine army. But David was not afraid. The Lord was on his side: David said, **“The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.”** (1 Samuel 17:37)

David had it right. He focused on the Lord. Here are a couple of acrostics to help you think about how to replace fear with faith.

FEAR

- F - Focused only on the problem
- E – Expect to be defeated
- A – Attitude of self-protection
- R – Ran from the problem

FAITH

- F – Focused on God
- A – Anticipated God's help
- I – Insisted on being involved
- T – Took time to prepare
- H – Had an impact on everyone around him

What side are you on? The FEAR side or the FAITH side? Want to become more hopeful? Don't wait for circumstances to change, but move from fear to faith. Replace your fear with faith.

The fifth trait: Replace ‘what if?’ with ‘why not?’. There are many folks who didn't believe that something was possible. “I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.” Thomas J. Watson, IBM, Chairman of the Board. “Airplanes are interesting toys but of no military value.” Marshal Ferdinand Foch, famed WWI military strategist, 1904. “We don't think the Beatles will do anything in their market. Guitar groups are on their way out.” Recording company expert, 1962.

What if these people had said, why not? Their success and history would certainly be different!

Roger Crawford was born with 4 shortened limbs, including two misshapen hands that protrude from his forearms with two fingers on one and one on the other. Everybody told Roger that he was never going to be able to do --- you name it. Yet, Roger learned to play tennis and won a NCAA Division 1 tennis championship.

Roger talks to audiences all over the world. He talks about turning the pessimist thought, "I can't" into the power of "I can." Instead of dwelling on his physical disabilities, he trained his imagination to say "what if." "What if you learned to play tennis? Wouldn't it be fun to watch the face of some opponent when he sees a guy with one leg and no hands beat the pants off him?"

Roger was invited to visit wounded combat soldiers who had limbs blown off in combat. It was depressing to Roger to see the devastating results of war. On that visit to Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, DC, he met a young man who was a Christian, who was lying flat on his back, unable to move.

Roger greeted the man who had a big smile on his face. "How are you doing?" The soldier said to Roger, "Hey, you don't have normal arms either. How can I pray for you?"

That question blew Roger away. Here was a soldier who was recently disabled who couldn't move, yet he offered to pray for Roger.

The soldier said to Roger, "I'm going to walk again, just like you."

"What's your secret?" Roger asked. "Everybody in here is devastated and depressed, and you actually have hope."

The soldier replied. "I'm flat on my back, so the only thing I can do is look up."

Roger told the soldier. "You know what? If you can look up, you can get up."

Raise your expectations and your hope will begin to rise. When you look up, you will get up.

Let us pray: Lord, we know that you want us to have hope, hope in you and hope in our lives. We know that you want us to believe that the impossible is possible. You showed us that in your son, Jesus, who rose from the dead, revealing your love for us. We know that, no matter our circumstances, there are better days ahead. We simply need to change our perspective to your perspective and replace our fear with faith in what you will do as you lead us. Help us to be bold as we seek to raise our expectations of how we can serve you and of what you can do in our lives. We thank you, God. Amen.