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St. John's Lutheran Church – Kimball, NE

Advent II – Midweek (dual parish service with Immanuel, Burns, WY)

December 7, 2016 Biblical Virtue: Hope

Text: Romans 5:1–11, 8:18–25; I John 3:1–3

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (I Corinthians 13:13).

The three theological virtues are faith, hope, and love. Last week, we considered faith; that divine gift of the Holy Spirit whereby we are able to see that which is unseen. The writer to the Hebrews defined faith as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Christian faith is that transcendent vision to see what cannot be seen; and by faith we know it to be true even though it cannot be experienced with our physical senses.

The virtue of hope is closely related to faith. Hope is also concerned with that which cannot be seen or experienced with our human senses. Biblical hope is the expectation of an unseen good, established by divine promise, and will be fulfilled in the future. Faith and hope are both concerned with things that cannot be seen, but they approach the unseen from different vantage points. Listen to how St. Augustine, a 5<sup>th</sup> century North African bishop, distinguished between faith and hope:

“But hope deals only with good things, and only with those which lie in the future, and which pertain to the man who cherishes the hope. Since this is so, faith must be distinguished from hope: they are different terms and likewise different concepts. Yet faith and hope have this in common: they refer to what is not seen, whether this unseen is believed in or hoped for” (cited from *Treasury of Daily Prayer* p. 988).

St Augustine was simply reflecting upon the Biblical distinctions made between faith and hope. In Romans 5, St. Paul, that beloved apostle to the Gentiles, linked faith and hope together while also distinguishing them from each other, (pew Bibles pg. 942)

“<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup>Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, (*notice that faith is the ability to see that we have justification and peace with God, that we have access to His grace in*

*which we stand in eternal life; we don't experience these things with our natural senses but we see that they are true nonetheless*) and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. *(Because we see things now by faith, we also begin to hope in good things to come; we hope in the glory of God! We haven't received that good thing yet, but it is coming!!!)* <sup>3</sup>Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup>and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (vs. 1–5). *(We are able to rejoice in sufferings because the Holy Spirit has given us the hope that good things will come out of suffering; good things like endurance, character, even God's love!)*

Christian hope transcends the evils of this life and awaits the unseen good that God will bring out of them. "Hope gives us a new heart that cannot be defeated by present pain or darkness. To live in hope is to know for a certainty, to know with one's whole being, that good will come out of evil, that there will be a happy ending. And not some forced, arbitrary, tagged-on happy ending, but one that is both natural and necessary, that rises up out of the evil itself" (Louis Markos, p. 124).

In Romans 8, St. Paul describes that great quality of Christian hope; the ability to expect good to come out of evil. (pew Bibles pg. 944)

<sup>18</sup>For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. *(Notice the sufferings are experienced now but the hoped for glory is in the future.)* <sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. *(Even creation hopes with longing for what we hope for!)* <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. *(Creation's hope is being set free from corruption! Sound familiar?)* <sup>22</sup>For we know *(that's a statement of faith.)* that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup>And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup>For in this hope we were saved. *(The Holy Spirit gives us the hope that we will be adopted into God's family and that our bodies will be redeemed forever! Neither of which we experience in the present except through hope!)* Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for

what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (*And there's the Bible's classic statement that our hope lies in the future.*)

Our hope is not in this world, not in political parties or governments, not in some golden age of human, utopian achievement, not in the steady progress of science and technology. No! Our hope is established in the new creation where we will live in absolute righteousness and purity as the Father's redeemed and resurrected children.

This is why we pray so fervently to God for true hope to remain among us. The Small Catechism's explanation to the 6<sup>th</sup> Petition, "And lead us not into temptation" teaches us that we are constantly asking God "to guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature many not deceive us and mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice." Despair is the loss of hope. For without hope there is only bitter disappointment and eternal ruin. The Holy Spirit defends us from despair.

For the Holy Spirit creates and establishes our hope in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In I John 3, the apostle John, that beloved disciple of the Lord Jesus, connects our Christian hope to Christ's resurrection. (pew Bibles pg. 1022)

<sup>1</sup>See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are (*that's a statement of faith*). The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup>Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup>And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (vs. 1–3).

Our hope is not simply to get to heaven. That's not nearly vigorous enough. Our hope is not just to see Jesus but to be like Jesus as we live in His new creation as His redeemed children. We don't know exactly how everything will be in the resurrection on the Last Day. But our hope is that we will be resurrected like Jesus; that death and evil will get a taste of their own medicine and forever be cast into the lake of fire; that we will see Jesus in His glory and live with Him in His glory. That future hope makes us pure and holy children of God now! "For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him" (Psalm 62:5). The Lord continue to strengthen and enrich your hope...

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.