

April 4, 2020 WholeLife Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2800 N
Orange Ave Orlando, FL 32804 Finding Hope Psalm 62:5-6

Do you remember, it wasn't that long ago that we first heard about a virus in China.

At first we wondered what was happening far away on the other side of the planet.

Soon we discovered just how connected we really are.

Then we were in disbelief that we had to really practice social distancing.

Our disbelief kept us from taking things as seriously as we should

We kept connecting beyond what was wise

Now we are "sheltering in place" and I think I can speak for all of us we are restless.

We are off balance.

We begin to wonder how everything keeps working. Working socially even with all the social networking. How do things keep working economically even with trillions of dollars being thrown at the economy.

Families are stressed coping with kids home doing distance learning.

And if the family gets sick or if this virus takes the life of one we love how do we cope.

Here in our local church there are concerns about resources sufficient to

- keep functioning,

- keep helping people,

- keep our staff in place,

- keep the facilities maintained,

- keep underwriting a school still teaching from a distance.

Our minds turn to controlling expenses.

But in the middle of all these various crisis points from the crassness of money to the profound life change if a family member is lost, we

must remember that our God is the almighty God, creator of heaven and earth, and he is sufficient.

Right now, hear it clearly our God is sufficient. Sufficient for each of us personally, sufficient for the church the Body of Christ, sufficient for his world that he loves beyond our understanding. He always is enough has enough.

In good and prosperous days with no pandemic it is easy to begin to imagine we are "okay" because of our hard work, or good planning or wise savings or our fortune to live in a wonderful country. We even imagine we are well because we practice healthful living.

Now our current reality calls into question our okayness. Our current reality is humbling. We aren't as amazing and great and powerful as we imagined. Our big plan to manage this global crisis is quarantine, social distancing and washing our hands. This unseen undetectable threat unsettles us. Our inadequacy, personal, community, local, national and global inadequacy is almost unbelievable. The impossibility to "fix" this is tough on us because we are used to being able to fix problems that arise.

Probably in some good ways, but also definitely in some detrimental ways it seems the world has squeezed us into its mold and we have come to live more as scientists than theologians. There is among us, even as God followers, a more conscious trust in formulas, research, entrepreneurialism, the labors of our minds and hands and the wisdom of our human understanding to provide the care we need in the world.

Maybe this crisis can assist in awakening us to the reality that we have been seekers of certainty willing to walk forward in life by what we can see and touch and feel and test and quantify rather than by faith. Walking in faith is to believe in the very substance and reality of things hoped for but not seen. There's evidence but it

feels more like a hint than a proof. Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

We may have fantasized that walking by faith is sort of easy. But walking in the dark can be exhausting. Sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see still there is uncertainty.

Right now think of our healthcare workers. Many of you at WholeLife Church are part of the health community even if you are not on the front lines of patient care you still are involved in supporting the health care operation. And you are tired, and for those who are frontline, bedside, intimately engaged in the care of patients you are really tired. A good week, a what was before a normal week was exhausting and now both physical and psychological demands have only increased.

Take courage from these words from Isaiah 40:28-31
Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;
But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

For those not on the front lines, all of us who are told that working from home and staying away from each other is the best way we can help, for a bunch of doers and achiever and people who love to be on the go "sheltering in place" can be exhausting too.

Around the globe our world has been shaken. Every nation, or group or tribe likes to imagine themselves special and hopefully one of the lessons we can hold on to when this is past, is that we are one human family. That we can be awakened to wish to get along, to

cooperate, to be mutually beneficial. We might come to recognize that while our languages are different, and we might look different, and our geography may be dissimilar, all the fear, all the hurt, all the pain is very very much the same. A middle aged person in any country with an aging parent feels concerns that feel very much like all those in the same situation.

The fear that hovers around the healthcare worker is similar regardless of nationality or locale.

David knew about having enemies you could see but they aren't that different from ones you can't see like a virus. David wrote Psalm 62:5-6 "I wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation my fortress where I will not be shaken."

So right now in the middle of this pandemic what is it that we can be sure of for which we hope? Of what can we be certain even though we do not see it? I'm not talking about Pollyanna like thinking. I'm not wanting us to embrace illusions. But where can we find some solid ground that isn't squishy or fickle where we can bravely stand sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Unfortunately that place isn't some fairy land where it all works out happily ever after. We are past that. Thousands of people have died, more will. As I write this there's a family of our congregation with dad on the ventilator, and mom was admitted for shortness of breath.

Unfortunately our current crisis reminds us that as we sort through all the pieces one of the outcomes is to once again realize that we live in a world of sin.

In Jesus' story about a field being prepared and carefully sown with wheat. And everyone on the farm is pleased with the work of their hands. The rains come at just the right time, and the seeds sprout

and begin to grow. And then the workers on the farm notice that all that has sprouted isn't wheat. That, unknown to them, someone came and sowed weeds among the wheat. The one who was mean and meant to harm the farmer and who sowed weeds, is identified as an enemy.

In our present situation it may not demand the active engagement of our enemy the devil. For thousands of years he has been influencing us to abuse our earth and its creatures and it may well be that the cumulative journey of self-seeking and abuse of nature have set in motion opportunity for events like this pandemic. But it is not God's work. He is not punishing. There is no doubt in my mind that he can use this horrible pandemic to teach us things we might not ever otherwise be able to learn We can redeem this evil by learning lessons for good and being people of hope.

When we look at the word hope it comes from the same root word from which the word curve comes and it really carries a meaning of a change in direction, going a different way.

Hope is more than optimism or positive thinking. Hope is change in direction from assumption that nothing will change, the badness of the world is what it is and there will be no change. To have hope is to move from that cynicism or being hopeless to confident belief that things can improve.

We have support to move forward setting some goals, finding means to achieve those goals, and believing we can affect change. Our hope and our encouragement to do this are anchored in our God.

The writer of Lamentations thinks about his times of affliction, maybe homelessness, wandering, bitterness and writes about his soul being downcast within himself. And then with choosing new thoughts there's a gear change. He writes:

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

It is within our powers of choice to decide what we want to think about. We can chose to dwell on difficulties, and the negatives of our current situation or we can recall other realities. He writes.

"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; GREAT is your faithfulness. I will say to myself; "The Lord is my portion therefor I will wait for him. The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him.

Hanging in the lobby of our church is large painting depicting the storm on Galilee.

Jesus had climbed in the boat exhausted from caring for the needs of people. Almost before getting underway, he has curled up on one of the bare wooden seats and fallen asleep. As they journey a storm brews. If you've ever been out on the water at night as the seas become rough and storm comes it can be frightening. The seasoned fisherman at the oars and rudder and sail have seen many storm working Galilee but none like this. They do all they know to do but it isn't enough. The situation is rapidly becoming hopeless and then they remember Jesus. Maybe a flash of lightening revealed to them his sleeping form. They shake him awake. They cry, "Lord, save us Don't you care if we drown." Jesus stood in the storm tossed boat and he rebuked the storm. "Quiet! Be still! And the wind died down and the water became calm. And what was hopeless became hope filled."

The children of Israel had just left Egypt, escaped from slavery, all is well until they see the dust of Pharaohs' army charging their way to take them back into bondage. They are trapped sharp hills to one side, the sea to the other, and an approaching army from the way they came.

Cynicism will rise again but here it begins, it would have been better if we'd never left. It's going to be worse now. We are doomed.

But Moses turns to God for deliverance, His hope is not in his might or his power or his abilities but only in God. And they walked through the sea on dry land and Pharaoh's army is destroyed in the pursuit as the waters return. Hopeless situation-yes in human strength and human wisdom, but when hope is placed in God it will not be disappointed.

It may not turn out as we imagined. Our temporal reality may be bad. But our God's eternal plan for the joyous reunification of all his family together will happen. He has promised that he will return, he will take us to be with himself, he will make all things new. In him we have hope.

When I was in Academy in voice lessons I was given a song I've sung on occasions, and the words are ones I return to when I need to build my hope. The title is God Knows All About Tomorrow.

God has measured time duration
Night and day are his creation,
And the changing seasons of the year.
He is ever watching over me and
Prepares the way before me
There is nothing now I need to fear.

Refrain

God knows all about tomorrow
He can see beyond today
Be it filled with joy or sorrow
He will show me the way.
So I do not fear the future
On his promises I stand
God knows all about tomorrow
For he holds it in his hand.

Life's uncertainties may haunt me
Foolish fears may try to taunt me

Till my life is filled with doubt and dread
He who set the planets spinning
Sees the end from the beginning
He will keep me through the day's ahead

All the world is in confusion
Peace on earth is but illusion
And the phrase seems only a cliché
But in trying times so fearful
I can still be calm and cheerful
And with glad assurance I can say.

That's the rock of hope on which we can stand.

Almighty God, I for all of humanity right now, that we will learn all we can as we pass through this experience and that we will be better, more Christ-like people for the journey. That when this crisis is past that we will come together to build a better more just world. Draw us together, remind us to touch base with one another, support one another and pray for one another. You can use even this pandemic to build our faith and trust in You that we might be people of hope, Amen.



What has surprised you the most in this pandemic?

How do you go about coping with the change in our lives?

What are some things that make it hard and what are some things you find easy?

What good has already happened for you as a result of sheltering in place?

In what ways has this experience affected your thinking about your particular people group and the whole human family?

How are we all the same in this time?

What builds your hope especially in a crisis?

How can you influence your thoughts during this time?

Where do you need Jesus to stand up and say "Peace, Be Still"?

What evidence do you see in scripture that tomorrow can be better?

How confident are you that God can keep you through the days ahead?



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