

## **In All Things, Hope**

Menno Mennonite Church

January 22, 2023

Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday

**Purpose:** To celebrate the hope of Christ that we have in faith and as a family connected.

**Message:** As people of faith, we are invited to place our hope where it belongs: in the perfecter of our faith.

**Scripture:** Luke 18:35-43; Isaiah 40:28-31

[among the resources offered us from MWC is international brothers and sisters reading this scripture via video. I hope to use this application for this occasion.]

**Synopsis:** When you have all your eggs in one basket you are willing to do almost anything to make sure that you are heard. The individual in our story knew this well and was willing to more than just passively hope in the coming promise of God with the best of intent. Instead, he reached out—obviously and boldly—drawing attention to his plight in the expectation that God with us would hear and act. With this in mind, we can join our brothers and sisters the world over naming Christ as our hope, come what may.

Note: This is Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday, celebrating, as Emily mentioned this week the first Anabaptist baptisms in 1525. Mennonite World Conference has published some thoughts and connections for this occasion, though they are somewhat skeletal, and could be used loosely. Developing themes of celebration and unity in Christ is appropriate without, necessarily, relying fully on the details of the suggestions there.

See <https://mwc-cmm.org/resources/anabaptist-world-fellowship-sunday-2023> for details

Luke 18:35-43

<sup>35</sup> As he approached Jericho,  
a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.

<sup>36</sup> When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening.

<sup>37</sup> They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth<sup>[e]</sup> is passing by.”

<sup>38</sup> Then he shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

<sup>39</sup> Those who were in front  
sternly ordered him to be quiet,  
but he shouted even more loudly,  
“Son of David, have mercy on me!”

<sup>40</sup> Jesus stood still and  
ordered the man to be brought to him,  
and when he came near, he asked him,

<sup>41</sup> “What do you want me to do for you?”  
He said, “Lord, let me see again.”

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to him,  
“Receive your sight;  
your faith has saved you.”

<sup>43</sup> Immediately he regained his sight and followed him,  
glorifying God,  
and all the people,  
when they saw it, praised God.

Sometimes hope comes easily. It can seem that way, in any case. When we are presented a challenge and are faced with the seemingly insurmountable, we shift fairly rapidly into research mode to move from problem to solution as quickly as possible. Let's take a fairly everyday hiccup, say, a flight cancelation that leaves us stranded far from home. Right away I can activate a checklist of how to get on with it starting with "what are my resources" including considering who I know in the area with whom I could call upon if the need arose, which I catalog while I jump online and look at the alternative options to get from point A to point B, all of which I do while finding the nearest customer service agent and getting in line to solve the issue as quickly as possible. Last week when I was traveling I was met with an initial scare when the gate crew announced a maintenance delay on my first flight out of Spokane. Standing a few feet away from the desk I could hear them grumbling about checking connections and not being able to catch a break, and I sprung into action putting my game plan into action. Fortunately, somebody figured out the issue within 5 minutes and we were on our way. But still, something was going wrong and I had a plan, even though it ended up not being necessary.

I think that is what we are primed for. Our North American lives and the way we lead them allow us a great deal of power and freedom to act on our own behalf. Even a far more serious issue than a minor travel hiccup transforms itself fast. You get the bad diagnosis and fairly quickly the question becomes "so what are the options" to at least to consider the way to step into this as proactively as possible. We want to know how to proceed, and sometimes we are given to researching our way out of our problems rather than every needing to consider where we might find hope. Hope is what we have after the options; but for now we can engage in that which we can do and can achieve. Other places in other situations, the list of "now what" is considerably shorter, so the language of hope is far more the lived reality and far more real. But whether we seek our options in our power or hope in that which we cannot control, we do well to recall the one in whom our hope resides even when there are no options left. Our hope, no matter what, is in Jesus, and that makes all the difference.

Our story this morning does not transparently speak to hope, but it can, and it should. Say what you will about this man trying to grab Jesus' attention, but he was operating in the region of pure hope. One of the fixtures of along the city street, he did not go looking for Jesus. He heard what was going on around him and learns what it was all about and he knows that his hope has found him at last. It seems a desperate scheme. I am sure that he has tried what ever

adaptation that has come his way. But here it is—not a strategy, not a method, not anything but the bold hope of one taking a chance. We can imagine him trying to be heard, trying to contend with those who would quiet him down and push him away. Screaming over the crowd, the hope of the hopeless does hear, does stop and does listen: “What is it you want me to do for you? I would like my sign back. Your faith has saved you.” And he is restored. The one who was on the margins, off and on the side is the one who connects with Jesus, expresses hope, and finds welcome in return. It is a simple story—one more time that Jesus stops and heals those all around him. But it is also a story about what it is like when you know where your hope is.

I don’t know about you, but my contingency plans for when things don’t quite go the way that they should, be it a minor catastrophe to a major, life altering incident, but telling Jesus about it does not find its place high on my to do lists. As much as I value the process of prayer and the absolute necessity that it represents in the life of faith, I don’t often find myself crying for mercy in the streets to see me through the challenge. To be sure, there are times where I know we have been sustained solely and completely by prayer—ours and that of the many who pray for us. But founding my hope in that movement of the divine was not my automatic response, I am sorry to say. I am too much the engineer and the out of the box thinker who takes a situation as a challenge to be solved more than a crisis to be lifted. Sometimes I need to be reminded to stop and cry out, for Jesus the healer of all is near to hand and ready to act. We can silence ourselves; we can be silenced by others—those whose judgement and skepticism we fear—and we can struggle to voice our needs and express our needs to the one who cares for them most. Yet Jesus is always ready to listen, prepared to hear, ready to heal if we can remember to do so.

I think this sense of hope and reminder of identity is something that makes our connections beyond ourselves so edifying. Where we have a plan and flow chart as well as hope, many of our brothers and sisters around the world, especially in the southern hemisphere, anchor us in to their far more immediate and acute sense of hope. I have a picture of a friend I met for one afternoon—we’ll call her Jessica. I met her and her husband in their upstairs apartment in one of the back-alleys of Bogota. There they welcomed us as visitors, a hand full of people trying to put flesh on a sister church relationship by coming and bearing witness to what they had to offer. They told us their story—on the run, in hiding, and now expecting their first child within months. They showed us the notes from the paramilitary elements of whom they had run

afoul: get out; and when we do find you we will kill you. The most recent was dated only a week or so ago. Yet with them, I felt their hope. Sure they were afraid, scared, and not quite sure what might happen. But they were ready to hope—for safety, for the future, for rescue of finding the long-shot visa to North America. They gave us their sermon: when Christ is for us, who can possibly be against us? I keep their picture not because I know how any of it turned out, where they are or all the rest. As is so often the case, that was just not in the cards. But for me it is a picture of hope; a reminder when hope resides. It is something from another part of my broad church family

We need our family of the church just as we need the families that we have been blessed with from the very beginning. It is in this family that we are given the broad set of gifts that the Spirit has given for the wholeness of all. Even as I admire the hopeful faith of those of our family whose needs and gifting bring them to the place of prayer far more readily and far more often, I don't do so to belittle them or to take them less seriously. Much the opposite, as a matter of fact. It is their faith and hope that I admire that reminds me of my need to be more ready to challenge my own. Accustomed as we are to the client-master relationship between those with relative power and those without, with all the stories that we are told so often that we forget that they are indeed just that—stories, we can forget that our family relationships are not meant to bring one group to the level of the next just because they are different. That is the way of the world. But it is not the way of the church.

The way of the body is the way of Christ which would call us to know each other as part of each other, as was planned from the very first. We can be inspired by the stories of the many around the world who we call brother and sister and can admire their faith for what it is—a faith like ours with unique gifting that is for the benefit of all. We come together across distance, across time, across language not because we have a common theological ancestor, though we do. We unite not because we agree on every idea of the way to be people of faith—we don't. It is not any of the commonalities that make a fellowship of cultures viable spare one: that we claim and proclaim, boldly the central truth together: that our hope rests in Jesus Christ, the one who hears our cries, and answers in grace and hope. This hope is what we share in good times and in bad, in challenge and in promise. It is a hope that the world needs for the big insolvable problems of the day. It is a hope that we need ourselves in our own lives left we are left tongue tied and unable to cry out even when Jesus comes near. We do well to remember that even that

around which we are most hopeless in our lives is not beyond hope. There is Christ. There is life; and in that, always, there is hope.

The next few years we will be working up to the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this anabaptist movement we call our home. There are already plans well underway for celebrations and renewal efforts around this time. A conversation around what does it mean to read the bible together—our founding *modus operandi*—in our day and age, even to the point of a bible version being undertaken with a commentary from an Anabaptist perspective. There will be much to do, and rightly so. But we will do well to recall that the point of the celebration is not the historical happenings themselves, but rather the way that they have founded, a way of being and believing that is alive today in the hope of Jesus Christ. This is where we are drawn and always invited to reach out, call for and give thanks. For this is where our hope is, thanks be to God.

Amen.