

“For this reason,” Paul says...

“For this reason it depends on faith.

Faith in the God “who gives life to the dead  
and calls into existence things that do not exist.”

We like to divide our faith into personal things and world things.

On one hand there’s this global hope,  
that God will look at the world’s suffering and challenges  
and will bring new life to those big problems:  
peace to wars, food to the hungry, healing to the sick.

It’s the hope that God is still active in the work of creation,  
and that the last day will not be a cold, dead ending  
but a rebirth into a new creation.

Then there’s MY hope. MY personal salvation,  
the belief that God is still active in MY life & the life of my loved ones.

It’s the faith - the hope -  
that the parts of my soul that feel dead will be reborn,  
that the suffering of my loved ones will come to an end,  
and that my future in this world and in the world to come  
is written in God’s book of life.

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Theologians - being people - like to argue about  
which kind of hope in God is the RIGHT hope.

We pit personal salvation and global salvation against each other,  
as if a global change would be anything other  
than a wave of individuals experiencing God's grace...  
as if the effect of God intervening in one person's life  
could do anything other than spill out into the world  
and the people around him.

In my 40's I thought more about global change,  
about what God's saving power looks like out in the world.  
But in my 50's I find myself looking inward.  
I find myself marveling at God's work in my own heart  
and in the hearts of people I know.

I was reminded this week of how interconnected it all is,  
reminded of how God is at work in both the personal and the global.

But since my preaching these days is more often about the personal,  
I wanted to take a moment to share with you  
where I have still have faith in God's love for the whole world,  
where I'm praying and looking for God at work  
in the big stuff, the big issues.

Put another way, these are some places where I still hold the faith  
that Paul describes so beautifully when he calls it  
God giving life to the dead  
and calling into existence things that do not yet exist.

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Against all recent evidence to the contrary,

I still have hope that God will call into existence

a lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. I really do.

I don't know what that peace will look like.

I don't know if it will come in my lifetime.

But I have hope that the cycles of violence will end one day

and that God will call into being a new way of life

for both the Israelis and the Palestinians.

We have seen so much death there since October 7th,

since the Intifadas, since 1973, since 1967, since the Nakba in 1948,

since the Holocaust, since the pogroms.

So much death, and more happening every day.

Sin upon sin upon sin.

So much that we can't agree on how to properly assign the guilt.

But we know that the tragedy of one persecuted people

killing another persecuted people is a perversion

of how the world should work.

And still... against all evidence... I have hope.

It will NOT always be this way.

When the Son of God was crucified he was crucified in Jerusalem.

When he rose he sent his disciples back to Jerusalem

to confront the very people who had killed him<sup>1</sup>.

And he told them to say that Jerusalem's salvation

comes from the very one they killed.

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<sup>1</sup> This idea is taken from the first chapter of Rowan Williams' excellent book, "Resurrection."

But this salvation doesn't come from their surrender,  
and it doesn't involve revenge.

Instead, salvation comes from his killers seeing  
that the One they crucified is risen,  
and discovering that the victim has returned  
not with vengeance, but with life.

Our faith teaches us, in a way I don't fully understand,  
that the world's salvation begins in Israel.

It begins in the place where death and despair is winning today,  
but that it will NOT always be like that.

God has the power to bring life out of death,  
and so I continue to hope and I continue to pray  
and I continue to give money to relief efforts  
because the God who raised Jesus from the dead  
is calling into being a new reality that doesn't yet exist.

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My next foolish hope is for this planet  
and for the human beings who will live here long after I have died.

I believe we will continue to live rich and meaningful lives  
for generations to come.

See, it's become common now in certain circles to believe that human life  
will be nothing but a disaster in years to come,  
even that bringing children into the world to come is a mistake.

I do not share that belief.

I am not a climate change denier.

I simply hold out hope that God will show us a way forward,  
will continue to lead us towards life, towards love,  
towards abundance.

Who knows what it will look like,

but I believe the existential despair too many of us feel  
is not the reality our descendants will live.

Things WILL change. Things always change.

But God has promised us life and I give my heart -  
which is to say, “I believe” -  
that by God’s grace human beings will continue  
to live and love for millennia to come.

Do not live as others do, Paul says, as those without hope.

If it’s true for us on a personal level,  
then it’s also true for us on a global one.

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The last foolish hope I want to tell you about today  
concerns the lives and flourishing of our young people.

(A middle-aged man worrying about those kids today -  
I am such a walking cliché!!)

If you heard me speak at the luncheon last Sunday,  
you heard some my worries already.

I talked about how boys and young men are struggling  
in a way unlike anything we’ve seen in recent years.

Falling further & further behind in education and labor participation.

Deaths of despair at unprecedented rates,  
loss of identity, loss of purpose.

One sociologist has said that young men are suffering an ontological crisis!

And what feels connected but in a way I can't really articulate  
is this great wave of gender fluidity among the youth  
and young adults of both sexes.

I have spent the last few years watching all this, living some of it,  
and there were times it felt like too much. It felt like tragedy.

But now I have hope.

Not hope that things are going to go back to the way they were -  
no, not backwards at all -  
but hope that the Holy Spirit is going to show us  
new ways to be men and women,  
new ways to live together,  
new ways to find our identities and our purpose.

As always, I have no idea what it will look like.

My hope is that God is maybe bringing us two truths right now.

First, maybe God is going to remind us that our bodies matter,  
that our identities are not just created in our imagination  
but are rooted in our beautiful flesh-and-blood bodies.

That we are beautifully created as boys and girls,  
and that we won't abandon the beautiful reality of our bodies.

But maybe God is also showing us another truth,  
showing us that what it means to be a boy or a girl,  
a woman or a man,  
doesn't need to look like what it looked like before.

Maybe God is showing us a fuller understanding of what  
Paul said 2,000 years ago in Galatians,  
that in Christ there is no male or female,  
that we are indeed a new creation!

At Holy Trinity we have several people  
living out this new way of moving through the world,  
some as parishioners and even more as family members.

I don't know if I'll ever see the world exactly the way you do,  
but I believe God is showing all of us something  
that we need to pay attention to,  
and I know that to be whole this community  
needs you here among us,  
and I want you to know that you belong here,  
that you are needed here, and that you are safe here.

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So...what does it matter if we have faith in God's future?

What GOOD is hope?

More pointedly, maybe some of you are muttering to yourselves,

“Well, Greg, I'm happy to hear you have hope,

but what are you DOING about peace?

What are you DOING about climate change?

What are you DOING for people who struggle

to feel accepted in our culture?

It's a fair question. Faith without works is dead, James tells us.

But if faith without works is dead,

then what do you call worry and fear without faith?

When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared and said

that a new chapter was about to begin in his and Sarai's lives.

They would move to a new land and they would bear children

even though they were way past the age

when that was possible.

But before they took a single step they believed in what God could do,

and God reckoned it looked an awful lot like righteousness.

God kept his promise and God brought life out of their bodies

and God called into existence a future that could not possibly exist.

Look deep into your own hearts, dear friends.

Look deep into the fears and worries that plague you in the night.

And then let your first step be to put your faith in God.

Ponder anew what the Almighty can do.

Amen.