

Lauren Speeth - Sermon Draft – for July 20, 2014
“HOPE IS AN ACTIVE CONSCIOUS CHOICE”

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you Lord, our rock & our redeemer.
I've loved Pastor Jeff's sermon series on head heart hands – It got me thinking about my thoughts and the premises I hold on to. One of them is hope. That's why I want to explore HOPE today.
MY PREMISE – HOPE IS AN ACTIVE CONSCIOUS CHOICE...

We hope for different things, at different times in our life. A little child might hope for an extra big slice of cake. . . and when I was a child, I used to hope for extra snow, so we might have a snow day – an extra day off from school. Abram and Sarai – that was their names before their baby Isaac – hoped for a child. It's what Paul called *hope against hope*, because it would seem pretty unreasonable at 100 to hope to sire a baby or bear a child.

Here's a joke about unreasonable hope...

Flood waters are rising and a person is calling *Lord, Save Me!* The Lord hears the cry.
A girlscout says “come with me” and the person says “no, I'm waiting for divine intervention”
A rowboat -“come with us” and the person says “no, I'm waiting for divine intervention”
Finally waters rise to the roof... a helicopter comes, and throws down a ladder.
The person refuses ... and drowns. Meeting God, they ask, “Why didn't you save me?”
Save you? I sent a girl scout, a rowboat and a helicopter... what were you hoping for, exactly?

But what makes THAT hope unreasonable, and Sara and Abraham not so?
Well, I think it's the difference between TOXIC and RESILIENT hope – here's what I mean
TOXIC HOPE – clinging to one expected outcome, and that tastes different from
RESILIENT HOPE – holding to a promise of a bright future, even when the mind can't fathom it

TOXIC HOPE... stamps its foot and demands God turns on the light
RESILIENT H... walks on, in expectation of a new day dawning

TOXIC HOPE... is embodied in the '70s hit song 'if I can't have you I don't want nobody baby'
RESILIENT H...might sing along to 'if u can't be with the one u love honey – love the one you're with'

TOXIC HOPE...is transactional. If you don't do this, God, I'll never walk into church again...
RESILIENT HOPE can be *flexible to changing circumstances* because it's based on mature faith – which Pastor Jeff has defined for us *as an active reckless trust in God's goodness*. The ability to hold on to HOPE - to wait, or have resiliency of hope in light of changing circumstance - is a mark of spiritual maturity & health.



Even when we fail to have RESILIENT HOPE, God is so good, God still works with us. We might suffer a case of TOXIC HOPE like that person in the flood. We might reject the Girl Scout – so God sends a speed boat. We might reject that too, but we’re never so big and powerful that we can stop God working. Even when Sarai and Abram took matters into their own hands, and Abram had a son Ishmael with Sara’s handmaid Hagar, God still worked with them. God still sent an angel to each of them with good news, and made each of them laugh. And now here’s Isaac – their son – their hope made real – and Isaac means laughter. Resilient hope is filled with joy.

It’s the words of the prophet Jeremiah, 29:11 “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”

God’s always there for us. Even when TOXIC HOPE says “MY will be done” God still helps us move towards resilient hope... the kind of hope that laughs, that trusts, that says “THY will be done,” because it may be a dark Friday, but Sunday’s coming.

It’s Proverb 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding. Because it’s said that faith is a gift. But I say to you that *hope is an active and conscious choice.*

Resilient hope. It’s a choice we can make – you and I – every day. Amen !

ROMANS

4:17-18 & 19:25 We call Abraham “father” not because he got God’s attention by living like a saint, but because God made something out of Abraham when he was a nobody. Isn’t that what we’ve always read in Scripture, God saying to Abraham, “I set you up as father of many peoples”? Abraham was first named “father” and then *became* a father because he dared to trust God to do what only God could do: raise the dead to life, with a word make something out of nothing. When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he *couldn’t* do but on what God said he *would* do. And so he was made father of a multitude of peoples. God himself said to him, “You’re going to have a big family, Abraham!”

■ GENESIS

19:25 Abraham didn’t focus on his own impotence and say, “It’s hopeless. This hundred-year-old body could never father a child.” Nor did he survey Sarah’s decades of infertility and give up. He didn’t tiptoe around God’s promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong, ready for God, sure that God would make



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good on what he had said. That's why it is said, "Abraham was declared fit before God by trusting God to set him right." But it's not just Abraham; it's also us! The same thing gets said about us when we embrace and believe the One who brought Jesus to life when the conditions were equally hopeless. The sacrificed Jesus made us fit for God, set us *right with God*.

²¹ ¹⁻⁴ GOD visited Sarah exactly as he said he would; GOD did to Sarah what he promised: Sarah became pregnant and gave Abraham a son in his old age, and at the very time God had set. Abraham named him Isaac. When his son was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him just as God had commanded. ⁵⁻⁶ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born. Sarah said, God has blessed me with laughter and all who get the news will laugh with me! ⁷ She also said, Whoever would have suggested to Abraham that Sarah would one day nurse a baby! Yet here I am! I've given the old man a son!

>> Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote in the 19th century "we can believe what we choose [and] we are answerable for what we choose to believe. The poet William James wrote "believe that life is worth living and your belief will help create the fact."

