



Hope is Eternal

Bible study for Lent 2016 - Sheridan Lutheran Church

hope is eternal

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a lenten journey

Sheridan Lutheran Church
6955 Old Cheney Road
Lincoln NE 68516
www.sheridanlutheran.org
402423.4769

Ash Wednesday – Hope Matters

As you begin, practice silence for 30 seconds.

The name Ash Wednesday is taken from the custom of putting ashes on the forehead on the first day of Lent, as a reminder of our need for repentance. The date of Ash Wednesday depends on the date of Easter, because it always falls 46 days before Easter. The ashes are the powdered ashes of the burnt palms of the previous year's Palm Sunday.

...all this flourishing life, turns to a little ash, a handful of dry dust, which every breeze scatters this way and that. All this brilliant color, all this sensitive, breathing life, falls into pale, feeble, dead earth, and less than earth, into ashes. It is the same with ourselves. We look into an opened grave and shiver: a few bones, a handful of ash-grey dust.

Remember man

That dust thou art

And unto dust shalt thou return.

Ashes signify man's overthrow by time, our own swift passage, ours, and not someone else's, ours, mine. When at the beginning of Lent the priest takes the burnt residue of the green branches of last Palm Sunday and inscribes with it on my forehead the sign of the cross, it is to remind me of my death.

Everything turns to ashes, everything whatever.

(Romano Guardini, Sacred Signs)

Recall the dustiest place you have ever been in. What did it smell like? How did the dust impair your vision?

“You are dust and to dust you shall return” is the statement found in Genesis 3. God spoke these words to Adam as punishment for disobeying God's command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

What does this statement say to you about your own mortality?

Have you prepared a will or estate plan? If not what is preventing you from planning for your life's end? What holds you back in addressing your mortality and end of life?

Do you/your family have a tradition of visiting a cemetery? Who do you visit? What feelings are stirred up in you when you walk through a cemetery?

Read Psalm 51

What does this Psalm tell us about the nature of sin?

How does this Psalm help you understand the influence of sin in your own life?

How have you seen God's mercy when you owned up to your sin? Have you offered God a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart? How did that feel? What was the result in your life?

Closing: Share prayer concerns with your group members. Gather these up in a closing prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer.

More Than Just the Past – Hope matters

As you begin, practice silence for 45 seconds.

God's promise to act in the future is more important than the fact that he has acted in the past.

Read Psalm 121

What is the message of hope found in this Psalm? How might this apply to your life right now?

Reflect on your inward journey of faith and compare it to a journey you have been on as a traveler? What are some similarities? Some differences? What are some similar dangers on both journey? What form has God's protection taken for you on either journey?

Read Matthew 26: 17-30

When you were growing up, what was the shape of the dining room table? Who did you sit by? What behaviors were not tolerated at the table?

In these verses of Matthew 26, Jesus makes a new covenant in his body and blood. In this new covenant he is changing the old way of remembering God's redemptive act for his people as they fled the slavery of Egypt. This very sacred act of celebrating the Passover would be changed forever for his followers. This new covenant is based upon the promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34 that one day God would initiate a covenant which would result in a deep, inner change in people's character and in the forgiveness of sin. This covenant is dependent upon Jesus' sacrificial death, rather than on human effort. In the future, as they remember God's saving act through Jesus' death, this new covenant is all about making them new and giving them hope!

Do you have an experience of communion that was especially meaningful in your life?

When did you come to the place that you understood the deeper meaning of the Lord's Supper?

"Hope is a choice in that we have this capacity to think about the future that's unique to human beings, and we build that capacity over time. It's really a personal choice that is made to either invest in this thinking about the future and your expectations about what might happen or to let each day go by passively without really becoming an active agent in your own life." (Shane Lopez, [Making Hope Happen](#))

How have you seen this principle at work in your life?

How have you chosen to be hopeful?

Does the virtue of hope really matter in your day to day life?

How do you seek to demonstrate hope in your living as a follower of Jesus Christ?

Closing: Ask each person to pray a simple petition of hope, asking something of God for their future.

We are not to withdraw from this world – Hope is a choice

Jesus' pain in Gethsemane followed by his hard-charging desire to face his accusers shows an example of our lived reality. We want our circumstances to change so we don't have to face them. The reality is that if Jesus had to deal with the hurts of the world, so then shall we.

As you begin practice silence for 1 minute.

Read Psalm 30

For what are you mourning? How long has your "night" been? How long before "morning" comes?

Has God turned a time of wailing into a time of dancing for you?

Read Mark 14:32-42

When have you fallen asleep at an embarrassing moment: In church? At work? In class? During a concert or recital?

If you were facing a crisis, what three friends would you ask to stay with you? How would you feel if they fell asleep?

Where do you go (or what do you do) when you are facing difficult circumstances? Do you prefer to be alone at these times, or in the company of close friends?

What is the closest you have come to going through an agonizing “Gethsemane” experience?

In what area do you struggle with a willing spirit but a weak body?

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

How does this story relate to issues you are currently feeling?

“The theological virtue of hope is the patient and trustful willingness to live without closure, without resolution, and still be content and even happy because our Satisfaction is now at another level, and our Source is beyond ourselves.” Richard Rohr

Closing: How can the group pray for you and the needs in your life? Invite each person to pray for the person on their left.

We are not simply to hope for something better – Hope can be learned

Jesus responds to Pilate making it clear that he has resigned himself to his fate. He refuses to speak and that shows that he has accepted this. What an odd juxtaposition. Pilate wished for something different, Jesus didn't.

As you begin, practice 90 seconds of silence.

Read Psalm 130

I pray to God – my life a prayer- and wait for what he'll say and do. My life's on the line before God, my Lord, waiting and watching till morning, waiting and watching till morning. Psalm 130: 5-6 THE MESSAGE

Have you ever lost sleep anticipating the next day's events? Did it turn out like you had hoped?

What are your depths from which you are crying for mercy?

Have you been waiting for something for a long time? Why don't you give up? How long will you wait?

"Optimism and hope are radically different attitudes. Optimism is the expectation that things—the weather, human relationships, the economy, the political situation, and so on—will get better. Hope is the trust that God will fulfill God's promises to us in a way that leads us to true freedom. The optimist speaks about concrete changes in the future. The person of hope lives in the moment with the knowledge and trust that all of life is in good hands." – Henri Nouwen

Read John 18:28-38 & 19:8-12

Were you ever bullied as a kid? What happened?

Have you ever been blamed for something you didn't do? How did you react?

Have you ever been summoned for jury duty? What was that experience like?
Have you ever appeared in court? How was that?

Share a difficult challenge or trial in your life.

Who do you think Pilate is most afraid of: The Jewish authorities? The authorities back in Rome? The crowd? King Herod? Jesus? His wife?

Pretend you are Pilate. How would you explain to your spouse later that night why you finally let Jesus be killed.

Jesus asked in v. 35 "What is truth?" How would you answer that question?

But the ultimate reason for our hope is not to be found at all in what we want, wish for and wait for; the ultimate reason is that we are wanted and wished for and waited for. What is it that awaits us? Does anything await us at all, or are we alone? Whenever we base our hope on trust in the divine mystery, we feel deep down in our hearts: there is someone who is waiting for you, who is hoping for you, who believes in you. We are waited for as the prodigal son in the parable is waited for by his father. We are accepted and received, as a mother takes her children into her arms and comforts them. God is our last hope because we are God's first love. – Jurgen Moltmann

Closing: Pray a petition for patience and endurance to get through a difficult time and for an awareness of God's presence in the midst of trials.

We are to actively participate in the world – Hope can be shared with others

As you begin, practice 2 minutes of silence.

Read Psalm 46

What is the most frightening natural disaster you have ever witnessed?

What 7 phrases describe God in this Psalm? Which of these have proven true for you?

How does being still help a person know that God is indeed God? (v. 10)

Where do you feel a need for God's special protection right now?

As was custom in crucifixions, the prisoner carried the heavy cross-beam through the winding streets as an "example" to others. Jesus, however, had already been without food or sleep for at least 24 hours and been beaten, flogged and beaten again. He would have been physically unable to bear the weight of the cross-beam. Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry Jesus' cross. We don't

know much about Simon, other than that he had two sons, Alexander and Rufus. Historians believe he was possibly a Jew from the north shore of Africa who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. We do believe he bonded with Jesus as he helped him. He was the only person to actively assist Jesus on the way to the Cross. Isn't this how we would all want to be remembered?

Read Mark 15:16-32

What is happening in this text?

Is there a shred of encouragement in this reading?

What challenges/frustrates/offends you?

What does this passage tell us about the nature and character of Jesus?

When did the crucifixion of Jesus start making sense to you?

What are you going to do about this reading in the next 7 days?

Hoping is not dreaming. It is not spinning an illusion or fantasy to protect us from our boredom or our pain. It means a confident, alert expectation that God will do what he said he will do. It is imagination put in the harness of faith. It is a willingness to let God do it his way and in his time. It is the opposite of making plans that we demand God put into effect, telling him both how and when to do it. This is not hoping in God but bullying God. – Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

Close in prayer. As each person shares a trouble, repeat “Be still and know that I am God” as a response.

We aid in the coming of a better world – Hope is eternal

As you begin, practice 2 minutes of silence.

Read Psalm 25

If someone says “my hope is in you” how should they act?

What about God’s character gives you the most hope in facing tough times?

Hoping does not mean doing nothing. It is not fatalistic resignation. It means going about our assigned tasks, confident that God will provide the meaning and the conclusions. It is not compelled to work away at keeping up appearances with a bogus spirituality. It is the opposite of desperate and panicky manipulation, of scurrying and worrying. – Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

Joseph of Arimathea showed so much courage in claiming the body of Jesus, preparing it and placing it in the tomb. He risked to make things better than they were. Can we do the same?

Read John 19:38-42

What kind of funeral would you like – where would you prefer to be buried?

What is happening in this text?

Is there any encouragement in this reading?

What challenges/frustrates/offends you?

What does this passage tell us about the nature and character of Jesus?

Was there a time in your life when you found it convenient to keep your faith a secret?

How does your fear of others and your love for Jesus sometimes conflict?

What are you going to do about this reading in the next 7 days?

Hope is a projection of the imagination; so is despair. Despair all too readily embraces the ills it foresees; hope is an energy and arouses the mind to explore every possibility to combat them. – Thornton Wilder

Closing Prayer: Offer a prayer petition for the world. Pray for the courage to love, forgive, and be gracious in your relationships.

