

Ok, so being a pastor married to someone who is getting their PhD in theology is an interesting life...not least of which because I get a lot of feedback on my sermons. And one pretty consistent piece of feedback I get is that my sermons usually have more than one ending. I usually practice my sermons for Mary Page (and then she makes them a lot better) and I'll say something and then keep going and she'll interrupt me and say something like, "I think you missed a great opportunity to stop talking right there." So I say that to tell you that my sermon today has like 3 endings and I wanted to say all of them so you'll just have to deal with it.

I'm sorry Mary Page.

On a much more serious note, I want to tell you that I intentionally wrote this sermon on Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning this week because I honestly didn't trust myself to write it in the midst of all the feelings I suspected I might be feeling after the election. You see, I, like I'm assuming all of you, am exhausted from this election season. I've found myself worrying and worrying and worrying. I've had to remind myself to go take a walk or play with my kids instead of doom scrolling social media, desperately and unsuccessfully trying to find some tidbit of information to reassure me that it's going to be alright. I wanted to write this sermon before I knew what was going to happen because I didn't want my emotional reaction to determine what I say or don't say on this day.

But that doesn't mean I'm suggesting we shouldn't have these emotions. Whatever we are feeling right now, those feelings are valid. We need to feel what we feel. And if we feel those feelings for a while, that's ok. Whatever you're feeling is valid.

And please know that I am here. If you need to meet to talk or scream or cry or curse or let out your feelings in whatever way you need to, I'm more than happy to meet with any of you, regardless of who you wanted to win the election. To a large degree, that's what I'm here for.

But the other reason I wanted to write this sermon before we knew the outcome is because really consequential events have this way of shrinking time so that we only can see what is the reality right now. It's so easy to lose sight of where we've been and to lose vision of where we might go. We are focused on the now. But our faith is thousands of years old.

While the specific contexts of each generation are unique, the feelings we have around those contexts are not. There have many times before when people were overwhelmed with dread and despair. And there have also been many times when people felt overjoyed with what felt like progress in the world. And throughout this long history, the people of God have relentlessly clung to love and hope because of our faith.

And our faith means many things but one thing it definitely means is that our ultimate hope is never in who is our political leader. The entire books of 1 and 2 Kings as well as 1 and 2 Chronicles, in the Old Testament is the story of how the people of Israel fared under various kings. And the writer loves to point out just how good or how bad the king was.

Sometimes he says, "So and so king did right in the eyes of the Lord."

And then he'll turn around and say, "So and so king did evil in the eyes of the Lord."

If we learn anything from Kings and Chronicles, it's that rulers are good and rulers are bad. And if our hope rests solely in who is our ruler, who is our leader, then it can never be a lasting hope.

The truth is that regardless of whether our preferred candidates won or lost, there is still so much that is horrific in the world. And there is still so much that is good and beautiful.

Even if every single candidate you wanted to win, had won their election this week, we still live in a world that is ravaged by war and violence, a world where far too many people live in the throes of poverty or abuse, a world where people die of preventable causes like lack of clean drinking water or not enough food to eat. We still live in a world that is so often ruled by the corrupt and greedy, a world where people still experience the sheer awfulness of racism, sexism, and discrimination.

Even if every candidate we wanted to win had won the election, we still have so much work to do.

And if every candidate you hoped would win lost the election this week, we still live in a world with beauty and goodness in it. If you don't believe me, just pay attention every week when our kids come up here for the children's message. We live in a world where millions of people give of themselves tirelessly everyday – unsung heroes who do all they can and more to make the world a better place. We live in a world where so often meaningful social change wasn't orchestrated by those in the most powerful positions but by people denied institutional power.

People like Rosa Parks who said I'm not giving up my seat no more.

People like Nelson Mandela who refused to allow 27 years in prison make him hate.

People like Abigail Adams who refused to let her husband get away without "remembering the ladies."

Time and again, we have so many examples of people, who when confronted with an opportunity to give in to despair, doubled their efforts to build the world they longed for, refusing to allow their hope to be extinguished.

We see that in our Scripture today. The writer of Hebrews defines faith as the assurance of things hoped for, and then he goes into this great litany of what he calls "that great cloud of witnesses," who show us what it means to live by faith....people like Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Jacob and Isaac, and so many more. And what I find so striking is that the writer talks about both the victories and the defeats of these heroes of the faith. He says that "by

faith, they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received their dead by resurrection.”

Wow. What validation for the way they lived their lives.

But in the very next sentence, he says, “Others were tortured.³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned to death; they were sawn in two;³⁸ they were killed by the sword; they went about destitute, persecuted, tormented—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy.”

You see, what these giants of the faith had in common is that their faith, their sense of hope, their willingness to put their faith into action, was never dependent on how things were going. When they conquered kingdoms, they kept going, by faith. When they were mocked and beaten and killed, they kept going, by faith. You see the great hope of our faith is that it is a hope that can withstand whatever external circumstance we face. And it must do this if it is to be any hope at all. A hope that is only there when we feel good about the direction of the world is a weak hope indeed. A hope that is only there when life is good is not really hope at all.

We need a hope that is strong enough to sustain us when the world feels like it’s falling apart...

That can sustain us when our loved one hears those horrible words, “It’s cancer.”

That can sustain us when the evening news seems unbearable to watch.

That can sustain us when a nation we love seems to be slipping from our grasp.

That can sustain us when we find ourselves in a world decimated by war, by hunger, by climate change, by natural disaster, by racism, by patriarchy, by addiction, by so many things that are so hard.

It’s in these times that we find out if our hope is strong enough. That’s when we remember that great cloud of witnesses and that two words phrase, “By faith.”

By faith...we keep going.

By faith...we don’t give up.

By faith...we relentlessly cling to hope.

And this faith that compels us to keep going is so important for one more reason. Even if everything worked out exactly like we hoped it would, the kingdom of God has not yet arrived. The writer of Hebrews brings his great litany to an end with these words: “Yet all these, though

they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.”

No matter how good things seemed, there was still more for them to do.

Mary Page has been hoping to get to Broadway to see the musical Suffr about the suffragette movement. And in that musical, there is a song called Keep Marching that goes like this:

I won't live to see the future that I fight for
Maybe no one gets to reach that perfect day
If the work is never over
Then how do you keep marching anyway?
Do you carry your banner as far as you can?
Rewriting the world with your imperfect pen?
'Til the next stubborn girl picks it up in a picket line over and over again?
And you join in the chorus of centuries chanting to her
The path will be twisted and risky and slow

But keep marching, keep marching
Will you fail or prevail? Well, you may never know
But keep marching, keep marching
'Cause your ancestors are all the proof you need
That progress is possible, not guaranteed
It will only be made if we keep marching, keep marching on

And remember every mother that you came from
Learned as much from our success as our mistakes
Don't forget you're merely one of many others
On the journey every generation makes
We did not end injustice and neither will you
But still, we made strides, so we know you can too
Make peace with our incomplete power and use it for good
'Cause there's so much to do
The gains will feel small and the losses too large
Keep marching, keep marching

You'll rarely agree with whoever's in charge
Keep marching, keep marching
'Cause your ancestors are all the proof you need
That progress is possible, not guaranteed
It will only be made if we keep marching

Yes, the world can be changed, 'cause we've done it before
So keep marching, keep marching

We're always behind you, so bang down the door
And keep marching, keep marching
And let history sound the alarm of how
The future demands that we fight for it now
It will only be ours if we keep marching, keep marching on, keep marching on.

Friends as people who are part of the church of Jesus Christ, we always are called to walk by faith, but there are moments in time when that call is so profoundly important and this is one of those moments.

By faith...

By faith...we keep hoping.

By faith...we keep loving.

By faith...we keep building community.

By faith...we stand up for the vulnerable.

By faith...we keep working for justice.

By faith...we never give up.

By faith...we keep marching.

By faith...