

Community Church of Issaquah

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## Is There Hope for the Future?

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It's really hard for us in this day and time to imagine the circumstances that surrounded the lives of the Israelites when Isaiah spoke his prophecy about hope. Once a powerful nation with strong leaders, Israel had become little more than a combat zone. Warring tribes on every side made life uncertain and fearful for these people who called themselves "God's chosen." It would not be long before the Babylonians came calling, destroying the sacred city of Jerusalem and taking its people into captivity. They were to become refugees in a foreign land with no hope of returning home.

Sadly, as we read news reports today of all that is happening in the Middle East, it is eerily familiar, isn't it? Invaders. Refugees. Wars. It makes us wonder if the Christians, Muslims and More are feeling that same sense of despair and hopelessness. In a land that has been racked with war and hate since long before the foretelling of the hope of a Messiah, history continues to repeat itself over and over again.

Now does it strike you strangely that this new messenger, Isaiah, begins to preach this sermon all about hope. He sounds like the ancient originator of the Power of Positive

Thinking, doesn't he? It was a hard sell, though. Imagine sitting in a refugee camp and hearing your religious leader spouting his sermon on hope. "The future looks good." "Help is on the way." "Somebody with power is on the horizon."

If you are like me, I would have been sitting there saying, "Yeah, sure. Look around here, dude, and tell me where there's any hope." We tend to be skeptical people waiting for some solid evidence that things will get better. That's a natural reaction, and it's called doubt. We all do it at times because it's harder to see the bright side of things when you are in the middle of your darkest days. I have been there, and I would be willing to bet you have too – that is, if I weren't Baptist and am not supposed to gamble.

So how do we find hope in these situations? I can only speak from my own faith journey, but here are a few of the lessons I've learned along the way.

First, before we can even find hope, we have to truly believe that a loving God would not leave us in our darkest hour. There will always be a way to find the light when we truly trust God to help us get to it. When my marriage fell apart and I found myself fired from my church calling because I was gay; when I could not find a job other than part-time waiter; when I was totally broke and living in an empty cheap apartment with one mattress and two chairs; and when most of those whom I called 'friend' had turned their backs on me – I was in my darkest hole. I would lie awake

at night, often crying, feeling as if there was no hope for me. I could not find a way out of my darkness. But when I began to trust in the loving God I had found through my salvation, I began to believe in my heart that I would make it through, and I did.

The second truth I had to remember is that life doesn't always happen on my time table. So many of our life experiences and expectations happen slowly. Life takes time. But in our microwave age, we want everything to be ready and fixed in 60 seconds. The reality is, we all know that isn't real. It's just that we do not always have the patience to wait. We are too anxious to find an answer to prayer or a problem to "hang in there." We tend to be people of faith whose response is often, "What's taking so long?"

Don't you think that was the question on the minds and hearts of the Israelites who had been given this big promise of better days to come and a promised Messiah? Can't you just see one of the refugees ambling up to their spiritual leader and asking him, "Rabbi, what's taking so long?" And then hearing him respond, "Just wait. It will happen in time." We wouldn't be surprised if the refugee shook his head, turned away and muttered, "Yeah, sure."

The third lesson for me was the hardest to wrap my brain around. It's that last verse in Romans 13. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy

Spirit.” Could it be that before I could find hope, I needed to ask God to fill me with joy and peace? That can’t be right. I should have hope first, then a big portion of joy and peace would come from that. Isn’t that how it works? Obviously not. There’s a hard lesson to learn here.

Until I came to a place where I could say, “Lord, I trust you” and began to find a sense of peace in knowing that God would see me through whatever happened, I couldn’t get to the ‘hope’ part. I recall the day that reality finally sunk into my brain. I looked around that dingy little apartment and decided it wasn’t so bad. I got myself two other part-time wait staff positions, began to make a little more money, bought some furniture at Good Will, and began to find some joy in my life again.

When I began to focus on the joy and the peace of God in my life, it was almost a surprise to me when hope came knocking. Now obviously as I stand here today, you know that my life did get better and I did find the light at the end of my darkest days.

We know that the hope of the Israelites was met. Jesus Christ came as their Redeemer, not as a new king they had hoped for, but a Messiah. As we prepare for Easter and the final days of the life of Christ, we must give thought to our own need for hope and deliverance. Our celebration of the life of Christ represents our hope in an age of hopelessness. The message from the Word of God today concerning hope is this:

- ❖ Trust God even in the darkest places
- ❖ Wait on the Lord, believing God is caring for us
- ❖ Focus on the joys and peace we can find first
- ❖ Hope will come in overflowing measure when those lessons are learned

These are lessons I have learned, sometimes the hard way, as I have found myself in places that seemed hopeless. You will learn your own lessons as you find your way through your dark days. The children of Israel found their way out of their dark hole as well. They did return to Jerusalem and they did rebuild their homes. Do you know what they found when they came home that gave them hope? It's what our Jewish friends will begin to celebrate on December 16<sup>th</sup>. It's call Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights. When the faith leaders returned from captivity to find their place of worship in ruins, there did not even seem to be any oil to light the lamps in the temple. But miraculously, the lamps were lit and with what seemed to be no oil, they burned for 8 days, giving hope to the Israelites.

We're not in the same place that the Israelites were, but we are living in a time when hope seems to be so much harder to find. Each day brings more bad news. Each day causes many of us to wonder when it will all end. Each day we fall into a time of hopelessness. I wish I had a magic wand to wave and life for all of us would be beautiful and happy, but I don't. You and I will have to do our own searching for

hope with a strong desire that we will not only find hope, but a fulfilling sense of peace.

Is there hope for our future? I don't have the answer to that, but I trust my God to show each of us where we can find even a small portion of hope in our own life. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." God knows we need light in our dark days. My prayer for you is that you will find your own light in the midst of your darkness and that you find hope in the midst of your hopelessness. It will happen, believe God on this.