



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JUNE 16, 2024

EZEKIEL 17:22-24; PSALM 92: 1-4, 11-14; 2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-10, 14-17; MARK 4:26-34

REMEMBER YOUR FUTURE



Every spring we always watch with hopeful anticipation at the deanery to see what volunteer plants might peak through the soil and stake a claim to the new growing season. A tomato sprout in the parking strip near the corner stop sign, vestigial hope from a cherry tomato dropped last year... nasturtiums along the side yard on Aloha holding court with the

rose bushes... or this year a surprise pansy just off the front doorstep nowhere close to any we've planted before, so maybe released there by bird or animal, but its location has become the delightful gift to us as we come and go.

Such volunteers invite a reflection on what it means to hold in tension the uncertainties of life (that we cannot know

or control everything in our orbits) and yet we hope that good things may come.

These volunteer seeds are signs of resurrection presenting in the course of everyday life. Can we be present enough to see these little signs of hope that help us make our way.

I have no desire to gloss things and pretend there are not real challenges in our time. Gun violence in our nearby high school that leaves us feeling helpless once more to effect real change, the cumulative burden of wars around a globe that weigh heavy on our hearts, a fractious political landscape that leans perilously closer to full rupture of our deeply wounded democracy, the tragic suffering of so many who rest their heads each night on the sidewalks of our city, the litany of names we read each month of those who have died while homeless in Seattle. The list of social ills is long, and we need not deny that uncomfortable truth.

And yet, as people who follow Jesus, who invites us to look to the parabolic seeds of hope, even in hard times, especially in hard times, we frame this life, broken as it may be, within the construct of a larger narrative that affords the long view along an arc of justice and healing and hope.

Hope is a theological virtue, my friends, not some sleek optimism or naïve pretense

or a thinly cloaked “power of positive thinking.” Hope is deeply seeded by God as a gift to us, and we have to tend the soil of our lives if it is to germinate and grow.

Hope is what I want to unpack today, and I’d like to angle in guided by the work of Jurgen Moltmann, who died earlier this month at the age of 98. He is considered by many as the greatest theologian of the latter half of the 20th Century, and his seminal book, *Theology of Hope*, which is well worth the dense read, came onto the scene in the latter part of the 1960s, during a similarly turbulent time of violent uncertainty and social upheaval.

To understand Moltmann’s brilliant orientation to hope, we must go further back to the dark days of WWII and his experience there. I encourage you to hear his story not as a snippet of history detached from our plight today, but hear it, if you can, as parable cast alongside the story of our lives here and now, and look for the ways it speaks its truth to you in this time.

Moltmann was 16 when in 1944 he was drafted into the German army and stationed with a dear friend at an anti-aircraft gun in his home city of Hamburg. In the waning days of the war, seeking to completely destroy and dishearten the enemy, Allied forces relentlessly bombed Hamburg with incendiary bombs that

burned the city to the ground, killing 40,000 civilians in the process. Moltman survived the great fire by hiding in the lake; his friend died beside him.

From there he was sent to the front where he surrendered to the first Allied soldier he saw. He would spend four years in POW camps in England and Scotland, where he recounts his horror at learning of his country's concentration camps by photos of Auschwitz and Belsen which his captors forced them to see. He felt shame and depression, and hopeless that there would be an end to his own captivity.

Raised on a diet of academic knowledge that held Einstein, Planck and Heisenberg as heroes, he was famished for a new way of seeing the world in which he was both perpetrator and victim, oppressor and oppressed. In his Scotland prison, a chaplain gave him a little book of the New Testament and the psalms. It changed his life. He found psalm 139 particularly meaningful: even if I go down to the depths of Sheol, you, O God, are there. And the Jesus of the gospels spoke to him as an assailed Christ who understood his own suffering.

Moltmann wrote: "This [Jesus] was the divine brother in distress, who takes the

prisoners with him on his way to resurrection. I began to summon up the courage to live again, seized by a great hope."¹

He would later say that he did not find Jesus in that POW camp; Jesus found him, and it changed everything from thereon.

The central theme of his theology of hope is promise—promise that God will heal all creation, and every human, and that our work today is to "*remember the future*" that God has promised. As one who saw both sides of the haunts of war and knew the particularly degrading effects of violence on the human psyche, both as perpetrator and victim, he claimed, quite remarkably, that no one will be left out of this ultimate healing.

"True hope, Moltmann said, "must be universal, because its healing future embraces every individual and the whole universe. If we were to surrender hope for as much as one single creature, for us God would not be God."²

Hope, then, is the active expectation and anticipation that God will heal and transform the world, and we orient to that while never denying suffering or injustice here and now. We hold the tension in our time, and bear witness to this future

¹ As cited in an essay by Douglas Koskela, <https://spu.edu/depts/uc/response/spring2k8/features/remembering-the-future.asp>, accessed, June 11, 2024.

² Jurgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, pg. 245.

promise in acts of healing and justice in the present. When we despair and are tempted to lose heart in the face of all we see now, we are called to “remember the future” that God has promised, and we carry on in hope.

So let us practice resurrection now, preparing the soil of our lives, and remember the future that is seeded in our time.

Mark 4:26-34 [*Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.” He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.*]



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