



Thrive in Ministry

A Hopeful People

Three Questions:

What are the issues that create the most anxiety and fear in your community? In your church?

When was a time when you spoke “good news” to the anxieties of your church or community? What was the outcome?

Pastors are not immune from fear and anxiety. When was the last time that fear or anxiety was at your door? How do you deal with these feelings in your own life?

In the 1960s, the world was reeling. Europe was divided between two superpowers. America was mired in the Vietnam War, the long struggle for Civil Rights, and the assassination of John and Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr. and others. The lingering impact of Hiroshima and the growing nuclear arsenals forced humanity to consider that they could literally destroy creation for the first time in history. What began as “the Christian century” had devolved into despair, anxiety, hopelessness, and fear. In this context, two German theologians, Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenburg, proclaimed that gospel still spoke hope into this world. (Olson, 2013, pp. 450–451) Their theology of hope was inextricably rooted in the theology of the cross. It was not an escapist theology, but an eschatological theology rooted in the suffering of their



“Without faith’s knowledge of Christ, hope becomes a utopia and remains hanging in the air. But without hope, faith falls to pieces, becomes a fainthearted and ultimately dead faith. It is through faith that [humanity] finds the path of true life, but it is only hope that keeps [humanity] on that path. - Jürgen Moltmann

age and the suffering of Jesus on the cross and the promise of the future. Olsen writes, “God’s seeming absence from this world is due to the ‘not yetness’ of God’s kingdom that will be and is already breaking in from the future.” (Olson, 2013, p. 452)

Today, theologians and pastors once again need to speak of hope to the hopelessness and anxiety that has infiltrated and sometimes even dominates the narrative of the church. The church does not need yesterday’s theology of hope, but a theology that

speaks hope and good news into the anxiety of today draws the church’s focus inward and builds barriers instead of relationships.

It is in this context that pastors must fulfill their role as resident theologians. Pastors proclaim the words, “Do not be afraid” and “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18 NRSV). They recognize that they do not have to have all the answers. Pastors can work with their people to wrestle through the difficult texts and theological/

moral issues with fear and trembling. Many pastors, in this project and beyond, speak courageously to the spiritual hunger for meaning, community, and transcendence. They have not succumbed simplistic moralizing, shallow theological certitudes, and stoking anxieties in order to ensure a loyal following or financial security. They courageously proclaim a gospel that does battle with the bad news of this age. They proclaim hope through the cross to the broken people within the church and to those who no longer seek God. It is a theology rooted in the cross, the tomb, and the resurrection. It is a theology grounded in hope and lived out in faith.

Telling the Story, Again

One of the premises of this project is that the relinquishment that Judah experienced in the Exile can serve as a paradigm for the today's church in the Age of Disestablishment. Just as the people of Judah needed to engage in time of soul searching and repentance, so too, the church today must engage in a time of examination and confession of the double-mindedness of having glimpses of the gospel, and yet being fully enmeshed in the values of this culture. (Brueggemann, 1986, p. 7) As in the Exile, preachers and pastors need to do more than speak judgement, they are also called to speak comfort and to ground hope in the faithfulness of God.

God Is Not Forgetful: The prophets spoke hope to a people who wondered if God had forgotten or abandoned them. "Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us; look, and see our disgrace!" (Lam. 5:1 NRSV) The psalmists and prophets remind the people that God has not forgotten God's children. In this age, preachers proclaim that God has not forgotten them and sees their suffering. However God is calling them out of their double mindedness.

God Is Not Powerless: The arrogance of Judah was the fundamental belief that god would always bless and protect them regardless of what they did. The fall of Jerusalem created a theological and political crisis for Judah. Were the gods of Babylon more powerful than God? The prophets' answer was that God was both powerful and God chose use Nebuchadnezzar as God's

instrument to bring about the repentance of God's people. God's fundamental purpose to redeem God's people never changed, but God could use any instrument to accomplish this purpose.

God Is Faithful: As Jeremiah travels to the potter's house, he witnesses God's willingness to "change his mind" and begin again (Jeremiah 18:1-11). The clay vessel is flawed, so the potter begins again. Though God began again, God was faithful to his purpose and his people. In the midst of their suffering, God offers hope.

This theme of God beginning again continues throughout the New Testament. Peter is restored to his calling as an apostle in John 21. Saul, the persecutor of the church, is transformed on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19). Ultimately, this message of hope is told in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. At the time when all hope is lost, God breathes new life into the world through the resurrection. Death and evil do not win. The kingdom of God breaks into the world.

Don't Live in the Past: Isaiah challenged the people to focus on the future, not the past (Isa. 43:18-19). God is still working towards the future. The church may not be able to see clearly the new things that God is doing, however, the church can rest assured that God will break into the world. God will continue to work for the redemption of the lost and broken people of this age. God is a God of hope and not despair.

Journaling Assignment:

Your pastor feels that God is leading her or him to take a stand on an issue that creates anxiety in their church. What is your counsel?