

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday April 24, 2022. "After the resurrection now what? A case for hope."

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're now well in 2022 and we've got some big things planned. A great group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's area is expanding and we are retooling our student ministry. We also have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can check all that out through our newly upgraded app, and social media sites. We're so encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

II Sunday.

Okay...we're past Spring Break, Easter, and headed towards summer. What can we take with us from Easter that will help us be who God has created us to be? And to help us navigate the difficulties and struggles in our world? That's what today is all about. To take the truths from all of the events of the last two weeks. From the triumphal entry into Jerusalem to all of the teachings of Jesus, to the last supper with the disciples, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. And let those inform how to live in our world. This first Sunday after Easter we're going to talk about hope. What a surprise huh? But not just about the benefits of hope, but how do we grow hope in a world that lives in, and sometimes feeds off of, spreading despair and hopelessness. A couple of related questions to start this off.

Have you ever had to stand alone in some situation? Everyone was leaning in one direction, plan of action, position, and you were by yourself in your belief? How did it feel?

What did you have to overcome or deal with in order to be the lone standout?

Because we live in a world that peddles hopelessness and despair, being a person who lives and practices hope will often force us to have to stand alone. And that can be a real challenge to living a hope-filled life. One, to just maintain an attitude and practice of hope is difficult. Two, often even more difficult is to make sure our hope is truly grounded in Jesus, and doesn't slide into dismissive toxic positivity just to combat the barrage of hopelessness we encounter. And to get us on the same page, toxic positivity is simply defined as dismissing emotions and real life suffering with false reassurances rather than empathy and true hope. And church people can be guilty of not taking other people's struggles seriously. Then trying to give them a hope that doesn't address what they're going through.

Have you ever encountered anyone using toxic positivity rather than real hope?

What did it feel like? Did it give you any kind of real assurance?

Our scripture Sunday was a different kind of one. It didn't really deal with the specifics around hope, but it did give us some deep truths about growing real hope. Read **Philippians 2:5-11**.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

Were there any specific thoughts or words that gave you a picture into growing real hope?

There were some specific thoughts that were pulled from this passage that talked about specific things we can do that would help us grow hope.

1. Anchor first. Anchoring is finding the unshakable, and making that your foundation, (talked about this in Nov. 2020). This is the promise, truth, **assurance**, (not certainty), that you return to when you feel hopeless. Assurance means God is faithful, but the results or outcome may not be what you wished for. Anchoring is claiming the last place you felt solid ground. Because really nothing in this world feels dependable, trustworthy, or is a good anchoring place. We find the teaching of this solid foundation in **Matthew 7:24-27** Answering these questions. **What are your limits? What are you able to handle? What can you actually control? What do you need to let go of?**

In order to grow this thing called hope, you have to have something not of this world that you are anchored to. So, when the storms hit, your foundation will support you.

2. Acknowledge reality and depth of struggle. Cannot gloss over or ignore truth. Sometimes you just need to admit that things are really messed up and you're in a tough place. Hard stuff needs to get named, pulled out into the open. And that's your starting point. If you're not good at this yourself, you need a LOVING plain-speaking, truth-teller, in your life. They'll do it in love. And only with your best interest at heart, committed to honoring and respecting your relationship. But they'll lay it all out there like it is. Hope cannot be born, realized, experienced, as long as you deny the reality of your situation. To feel REAL hope you have to **name what makes you feel hopeless**.

3. Invest in Joy. Actively squirreling away little pieces of things that grow joy within you. The ultimate goal is having a huge account of joy, but it will take time and effort to grow. This is the admission you cannot grit yourself towards joy. It isn't how much joy you have in the moment, but you are doing things to add to a total larger joy. Doing things such as **Worship, scripture reading, prayer, serving, etc.** Actively and regularly do the things that bring joy. Little bits of intentional movement that bring joy, added to a running total will add up over time. This is a **commitment to the long game**. Admit you're not there yet, may be pretty far away, but you're focused on going that direction.

4. Invest in choosing hope. Like with joy, there is a total plan, amount, you want to have, and you're doing the little things to gain the big thing. Emphasis is on "*choosing*". You decide if hope is something you want to spend time, energy, resources, investing in. You have an anchor that holds you, and protects you against the discouragement of the here and now. Open yourself to pain, hurt, be vulnerable and real about where you are and your current situation. You see struggle, but are not focused on struggle. There is another side. And you are "choosing" to focus on that. But it's a process of growth and development that moves you towards hope. This is the **active resistance of hope**.

III Challenge.

The challenge and struggle is real. Life is hard, and an easy path would be just resigning yourself to hopelessness. Again Hope is an act of resistance, swimming against the cultural current.

So, what little habits or practices could you work into your life that would invest in your ability to grow hope...REAL hope?