

“Hope Ahead”

The Rev. Drew Willard
UCC at The Villages, FL
July 20th, 2014
6th Sun. after Pentecost

Romans 8:12-25

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

[The Apostle Paul said,]

We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope.

Who hopes for what they already see?

Romans 8:24

Let us pray... O God,

Even when we can't see it, make us bold to hope for a better world
and to keep working for it.

Amen

Hard to have hope for this world sometimes when you look at the news.

It is not hard to see that desperate challenges remain before us
as a society, and as a world.

Civil wars rage in Nigeria, Israel, and Syria where thousands are displaced
and now in the Ukraine where a Malaysian airliner was just shot down,
with 298 passengers aboard, of whom more than 100 were
top HIV/AIDS researchers and activists.

A lot of hopes were lost this week.

Closer to home we have our own high profile incidents of indiscriminant violence
from gang warfare and personal vendettas with collateral damage
affecting innocent people.

One issue stands out in particular as a troubling crisis, and that is,
that there are more than 50,000 unaccompanied children,
who have crossed our borders.

So, what do we hope for in the face of realities like that?

Hard to know what to do, or if there's anything we can do.

Nevertheless, we are challenged to hope.

The Apostle Paul speaks of hope in the context of transcending
of either living a life of literal conformity to law or a life of lawless deformity.

Instead, Paul reminds us that we are heirs of God with Christ.

Now Paul speaks about “Christ” in the way that Jesus Christ speaks about
the “Kingdom”.

Jesus often taught his disciples about ‘the Kingdom’ through parables
like the one in this morning's Gospel lesson.

Jesus described the Kingdom of Heaven in terms of a farm
where a farmer planted good seed, and an enemy planted weeds,
and apparently, do many of them, that simply pulling out the weeds,
would not be cost effective.

Willard, p.2

So, that farmer had a situation where the wheat and the weeds had to grow together, until harvest-time, when everything would be cut down and then separated between the wheat and the weeds.

The term 'beloved community' comes from the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's and is a term that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. used for the vision of what American society could become – especially, in the South.

I believe that 'beloved community' can also serve as an inclusive term for what the Kingdom of God is about as an achievable goal.

There was that expectation in the Civil Rights Movement that American society could be transformed to become a social reality of justice & peace.

Certainly, there's plenty of work yet to be done, but our society these days has become different – and much improved from what it was, though that success is being challenged.

There are still a lot of weeds along with the wheat.

Like anything, when you know somebody, it makes a difference about an issue – and regarding the crisis of thousands of unaccompanied children who crossed our borders, I got sensitized to this issue by talking to Carol Correa, who said she meant to lift up a prayer for these children last week during Joys & Concerns.

Monica Peidl had recently preached about immigration, and there was a strong response to her message about this issue of interest – if not necessarily agreement.

Both Carol and Monica got me to take a closer look at this issue and so, I went to the UCC website to see what our church had to say about it.

The National setting of the UCC is reporting that these children are fleeing the epidemics of gang violence, forced conscription into gangs, trafficking of drugs and sex slavery.

They are fleeing from the brokenness in the societies of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.

The UCC is encouraging us to write our congressman to insure there is funding to provide shelter for these children.

I got a response and felt this particular congressman has a grasp of the facts of the matter, but I am not confident he has interpreted those facts in a constructive way.

In his letter back to me, he began by saying our government has labeled these children as UAC or 'Unaccompanied Alien Children'.

Labeling can be a way to depersonalize a group of people and ignore the fact that these are children we are talking about – vulnerable people who deserve our recognition and help.

Willard, p.3

I did not get the impression that this congressman was committed to any immediate action.

Politically incorrect language, prejudice, and political gridlock, are all forms of weeds in and amongst the wheat.

When you know somebody, it makes a difference.

We might ask, is it our responsibility to receive these children, when the societies they came from need to be fixed—just as ours needs fixing, too?

To what extent is this a crisis we have caused?

I don't mean the promise of amnesty, real or perceived.

In what ways have our trade agreements been responsible?

Has the demand for illegal drugs or the sex trade in this country helped foster the illegal activities in these other countries?

Or have we simply failed to take more of an active concern in Latin America?

When you know somebody, it makes a difference.

This issue has been floating around in recent weeks,

but has come to national attention as military bases and FEMA were called in to assist Health & Human Services.

Alarmists are concerned that these are not all 'children',

but adults passing themselves off as children to seek easy access across our borders.

And besides that, they are supposedly carrying 'third world diseases'.

The only way to make a hopeful change is to see through such fears, while taking into account real dangers.

But for a start, we need to see these children as our children.

How could we help fix the dysfunctional societies that they came from?

The answer may be in how we go about fixing our own.

Though the wheat and the weeds are growing side by side in certain situations, we still need to take care of the wheat,

even if we can't pull out the weeds for the time being.

Children are our future – that is the issue. They are our hope for the future.

Recognizing that how these children see the world

will mean the difference between them growing up

to be ignorant drones for some illicit activity

or to become people who believe they can make a difference for the good.

There are broader implications of this with the young people in our own society and how well we address their needs through education and protect them.

What the church has to offer is a vision of hope for a transformed society – the Kingdom as beloved community,

and that the next generation is important now.

Amen

*Our lesson today comes from Romans 8:12-25
in which Paul emphasizes a theme of hope.*

*As children of God, we are neither bound to law nor free to be lawless,
but we have an inheritance of liberty and an obligation for justice...*

[The Apostle Paul said,]

[12] So then, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation,
but it isn't an obligation to ourselves to live our lives on the basis of selfishness.

[13] If you live on the basis of selfishness, you are going to die.

But if by the Spirit you put to death the actions of the body, you will live.

[14] All who are led by God's Spirit
are God's sons and daughters.

[15] You didn't receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear,
but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children.

With this Spirit, we cry, "Abba, Father."

[16] The same Spirit agrees with our spirit,
that we are God's children.

[17] But if we are children, we are also heirs.

We are God's heirs and fellow heirs with Christ,

if we really suffer with him so that we can also be glorified with him.

[18] I believe that the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory
that is going to be revealed to us.

[19] The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation
for the revelation of God's sons and daughters.

[20] Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice—
it was the choice of the one who subjected it—but in the hope

[21] that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay
and brought into the glorious freedom of God's children.

[22] We know that the whole creation is groaning together
and suffering labor pains up until now.

[23] And it's not only the creation.

We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest

also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free.

[24] We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope.

Who hopes for what they already see?

[25] But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.

Let us be guided and challenged by these words.

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43 [CEB]

[24] Jesus told them another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like someone
who planted good seed in his field.

[25] While people were sleeping,
an enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat and went away.

[26] When the stalks sprouted and bore grain,
then the weeds also appeared.

[27] “The servants of the landowner came and said to him,
‘Master, didn’t you plant good seed in your field?
Then how is it that it has weeds?’

[28] “‘An enemy has done this,’
he answered.

“The servants said to him,
‘Do you want us to go and gather them?’

[29] “But the landowner said,
‘No, because if you gather the weeds,
you’ll pull up the wheat along with them.

[30] Let both grow side by side until the harvest.
And at harvesttime I’ll say to the harvesters, “
First gather the weeds and tie them together in bundles to be burned.
But bring the wheat into my barn.” ”

[36] Jesus left the crowds and went into the house.

His disciples came to him and said,
“Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

[37] Jesus replied,

“The one who plants the good seed is the Human One.

[38] The field is the world.

And the good seeds are the followers of the kingdom.

But the weeds are the followers of the evil one.

[39] The enemy who planted them is the devil.

The harvest is the end of the present age.

The harvesters are the angels.

[40] Just as people gather weeds and burn them in the fire,
so it will be at the end of the present age.

[41] The Human One will send his angels,

and they will gather out of his kingdom
all things that cause people to fall away and all people who sin.

[42] He will throw them into a burning furnace.

People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.

[43] Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom.

Those who have ears should hear.”