

Living In The Overflow of God's Love

Love Always Hopes

Lucy: My life is a drag. I'm completely fed up. I've never felt so low in my life. . .

Linus: When you're in a mood like this, you should try to think of things you have-- to be thankful for . . . in other words, count your blessings.

Lucy: Ha! That's a good one! I could count my blessings on one finger! I've never had anything, and I never will have anything!

Lucy: I don't get half the breaks that other people do . . . nothing ever goes right for me! And you talk about counting blessings! You talk about being thankful! What do I have to be thankful for?

Linus: Well, for one thing you have a little brother who loves you.

Lucy: (they hug) Waaaa!

Linus: Every now and then I say the right thing."

I've been struck by this reading from a few weeks ago: "Everything in the world of culture can be made sense of without God; nothing in the world of Scripture can be made sense of without God." This morning we come together as a worshipping community that is shaped and renewed by Scripture. To look at the Scripture as a mere text book of information about God would be fatal for a church that wants to honor God. The Scripture is much larger and more active than we tend to perceive. God both was and is active in Scripture. Scripture is revelation. When a living God reveals himself the result is a living truth. So this morning my prayer is that we come with an expectant heart that God will reveal himself to us in his word.

The story of Noah (Gen 7:24-8:10)

Noah sent a raven on a scouting mission, and with anticipation of good news, it never returned. He then sent a dove, but it returned empty handed. After seven days time, Noah sent out the dove again, with anticipation.

Everywhere Noah looks, he sees water. The day is getting late, and still no sign of the dove's return. You know the feeling Noah has. You've stood where Noah stands. You had your share of floods in life. Flooded by grief at the cemetery, or the stress at work, the anger at the limitations of your body. You've seen the flood waters come and go. And my guess is, you seen the sun set on your hopes as well.

We have a lot in common with Noah. And like Noah, we need some hope. Hope doesn't promise an instant solution to your floods in life, but it does give us the realization that the possibility of an eventual solution will come. Sometimes, we need a little hope. Hope. It's what Noah needed. Hope-- is what Noah received.

Late in the day Noah waits on the Ark for the return of the dove.

"When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf" **Genesis 8:11a, NIV.**

An olive leaf! The dove comes back with an olive leaf in its beak. This olive leaf is not just a piece of a tree, it's a reminder of God's promise. What this bird brought to Noah was **HOPE**. Hope is like the olive leaf that expresses that there's dry land after a flood.

I love the olive leaves of life.

- The doctor's report shows some progress and things are getting better.
- It looks like with us working together we can get through your difficulties with your finances.
- Hang there, and we'll get through this together— you're not alone.

God is the giver of leaves.

•**The woman brought to Jesus** after being caught in an adulterous situation and finds herself standing in the midst of anger and hopelessness

-But then Jesus speaks "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." **John 8:7, NIV.**

-Everyone drops their stones and before long it is only the woman and Jesus. Jesus offers her a leaf. A leaf of hope. "Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no-one condemned you?" "No-one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." **John 8:10,11, NIV.**

•**Martha.**

-Her brother Lazarus is dead and she grieves her loss.

-Her friend Jesus is late "“Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." **John 11:21,22, NIV.**

-Jesus comes and offers Martha a leaf of hope "Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." **John 11:25-27, NIV.**

•**Jesus also gives us leaves of hope.**

-Jesus gives us grace and life

-Jesus gives us forgiveness of sin.

-Jesus defeats death

Have you received your leaf of hope? If so share it! What do you suppose Noah did with his leaf of hope? My guess is the family saw that olive leaf. What do you do with olive leaves? You pass them around. You give them to the ones you love. **Love always hopes! 1 Cor. 13:7**

Love bears all things, love believes all things, love hopes all things and love endures all things.

Love has hope in you. And love is just as quick to say "I have hope for you."

There's a reason why we can say this. For many of us here today, we've been through a lot of stuff. Many of us are "flood survivors." By God's love and grace, you have found dry land. And because of this you are qualified to give hope to others.

Mark Twain once advised parents that when their child turns 13 they should put them in a barrel, close the lid, and feed them through a hole in the side. When they turn 16, Twain suggested parents close the hole!

This is funny for those of us who have lived through our teenage years. But we also know it can be tough. But we made it, didn't we? You see our young people need leaves of hope. Many of them need to hear that they'll be all right-- that they will also make it through these tough years.

Young married couples

Max Lucado says it this way: It happens in every marriage. The honeymoon ends, and the river of romance becomes the river of reality, and they wonder if they will survive. And you can tell them they will. You've been through it. Wasn't easy, but you survived. You and your spouse found dry land.

Are you a cancer survivor? Then someone in the cancer ward needs to hear from you.

Have you buried a spouse and lived to smile again? Then find the recently widowed and walk with them.

We not only have an opportunity--but an obligation to give hope to those who are in the midst of floodwaters.

Place in history

Lance Armstrong- Survivor of testicular cancer that metastasized to his lungs and brain has his place in history. Armstrong's coach, Chris Carmichael says.

"People need something to grasp onto when they are helpless," he says. "Lance has been there and was able to pass through it. And who knows why?"

"And that's why people think, 'If it can happen to him, it can happen to me.'"

"Lance gives us all evidence that hope is alive and miracles do happen."

We are bearers of hope!

You remember Paul's words in **2 Cor. 1:3-4** Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Encourage those who are struggling. If it's difficult for you to know what to say then open your bible. "The olive leaf for the Christian is a Scripture."

Rom 15:4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

If you have a bible and you know a Noah, start passing out leaflets of hope.

Those suffering in their grief: Heb. 13:5b "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Those who are weighed down in their guilt: Rom. 8:1 there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

To the jobless: Rom. 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."

To those who feel that they are beyond the reach of God's grace: John 3:16 whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Christian, your bible is a basket of leafs. Share these leafs while sharing yourself. The power of God has amazing impact in the lives of people. God gave Noah a leaf of hope, and it changed him. **Gen 8:11** When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth.

God wants to change us too. Living in the overflow of God's love puts us on the road for God to work in our lives in order to change us, but it also enables God, through us-- to work in the lives of other people. Spend yourself in the lives of others and whether we live long enough to see the results or not let God do his work.

Charlie Brown and Linus are looking at a little sapling just planted.

Charlie Brown: It's a beautiful tree, isn't it?

Linus: Yes, it is.

Charlie Brown: It's a shame that we won't be around to see it when it's fully grown.

Linus: Why? Where are we going?

What a difference one leaf makes!