**Hope Remembered**

**FBC Albemarle**

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I know all of you are people of grace and mercy, so I am sure you would never tell someone, “I told you so!” However, if you google “I told you so stories,” millions of results will pop up in less than a second. Seems there are a lot of stories that ends with the proverbial “I told you so.” Here is one of my favorites and you can probably guess why.

The author writes: “My husband and I went to Lake Tahoe with some friends of mine to go skiing. One of the days, there was a HUGE white-out snowstorm. It was big enough that the roads were closed and under the control of National Guard. The next day, we started to get a little stir crazy and had a craving for Tamales, so we drove around the Lake on the east side to a Mexican restaurant.

My husband is one of those people who has to be the World's Leading Expert in Everything. As we began the drive home, he asked our opinion: should we drive back the way we came or go the other way around the lake. I said that considering the storm, we should go back the way we came, since we knew it was open and safe for our non-4wd vehicle.

He smirked and said that my answer "said something about me" and decided to go the other way. We drove for 20 minutes and then we came to a blockade: Road Closed - Avalanche Hazard. We had to turn around and go back the way we came. I didn't say it.”

I like to think Jesus had a sense of humor. Not the snarky or sarcastic humor like mine but the kind that is gentle and genuine. I envision Jesus having this deep belly laugh because he found true joy in life. Jesus probably never took himself too seriously because he was comfortable in his own skin. He didn’t have to prove himself because He knew his identity and his mission. He just lived life. However, he might have been tempted to say, “I told you so” to his followers.

It was Sunday morning, the day after the Sabbath. Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Council who believed Jesus to be who he said he was, took the body of Jesus and placed it in his own tomb after Jesus had died. The Scripture says the women had gone with him that Friday to place his body in the tomb. The women went home to prepare the spices and perfume for the body but rested on the Sabbath as was the tradition.

So, early on Sunday morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb where Jesus had been placed. When they got to the tomb, the stone that had been placed at the entrance had been rolled away and the body was nowhere to be found. Then suddenly, two angels appeared and reminded the women of what Jesus had taught them on several occasions. “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” (v. 5b-7)

Then Luke tells us my favorite verse of this passage: “Then they remembered his words.” (v. 8) A hint of Jesus lovingly saying, “I told you so!” “I told you I had to die in order for you to have life. I told you death would be defeated because my Father would raise me up from the dead. I told you the kingdom of God is here!” If there ever is a time when I don’t mind hearing someone tell me “I told you so,” it would be at this time! I imagine it was in that moment at the tomb that the women remembered the hope that is found in the risen Savior!

Christian hope is different than the hope we find in the world. While hope in the world is filled with uncertainties, the hope found in Jesus is covered with certainty. We have certainty that Jesus came to give us life that is abundant. We have certainty that Jesus loves us without limits. We have certainty that Jesus paved the way to eternity spent in the presence of God. We do not have to be afraid. We do not have to worry. In Christ, we have hope and this hope gives us a way forward.

First, hope gives us confidence. As followers of Jesus, we know who we are where we live. We are sons and daughters of God whom the spirit indwells, and we live in the unshakeable kingdom of God. Because we are sure of these two facts, we can live with confidence that God desires the best for us. We don’t have to wonder if we are living in God’s will. If we are living in his kingdom, we can be confident we are living in his will.

I think that the true meaning of Easter is about being confident in the hope found in Jesus. It is not the kind of hope that comes from a confidence in our own skill, knowledge, or ability. It is confidence that comes solely from the fact that God is God, and that he is the kind of God who comes into our own human existence to reveal himself, call us to himself through the life he lived, call us to a life of sacrifice by sacrificing himself on the cross and provide us with life abundant through his resurrection.

Hope not only leads to confidence, it also leads to faith. Most of the time, we think about faith as something to attain. It is either something we have or something we achieve at some point in time. But what if we began thinking about faith as a living, breathing part of life? What if we consider faith as an action that can increase in size and in depth? As we learn to trust God more and hope in the person of Jesus, would our faith not increase? As we practice our faith more, would our trust in Jesus not grow deeper?

Think of faith as a muscle, something that is living. When we want to increase the strength and endurance of our muscles, we have to work out the muscle to the point of fatigue. When you stress the muscle beyond the threshold your body already adapted to, you might feel sore. With adequate rest and proper nutrition, the muscles will regenerate and grow with a higher threshold. This is the case for our faith. The more hope we place in Jesus, more we will grow in faith.

Finally, hope helps us to experience abundant life today and hereafter. Our ultimate hope is to spend eternity in the presence of God because our earthly lives are but a blink of an eye. Eternity is a long time and the Christian hope in Jesus assures us of the eternal communion with God. Yet, if abundant life was only attainable in the afterlife, our earthly lives would be a practice of cruelty. Why would God, who loves us, make us suffer through an earthly life to only experience an abundant life after death? This is not the God who loves us and desires the best for us.

Jesus said he came to give us life that is abundant. I believe this to be true. When we continually place our trust in Jesus, our hope in him deepens and we experience life fuller than before. We experience the fruit of living with God: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. These are the experiences that lead to an abundant life. This is what Jesus promised when we hope in him.

I think there is an immense difference between hope and wishfulness. A seminary student once wrote: “I see hope as an attitude where everything stays open for me. Not that I don’t think of my future in those moments, but I think of it in an entirely different way. Daring to stay open to whatever will come to me today, tomorrow, two months from now, or a year from now – that is hope. To go fearlessly into things without knowing how they’ll turn out, to keep on going, even when something doesn’t work the first time, to have trust in whatever you’re doing – that is living with hope.”

I think that’s what Easter represents. The tomb is open and there is no reason to look for the living among the dead. Jesus is risen! Because he lives, I can live with hope; a hope that opens God’s kingdom for my life and a hope that opens my life for God’s kingdom. Glory to God! Hallelujah, He is risen indeed!