



Hope in the Rearview Mirror

TEXT
2 Timothy 4:6–22

November 5, 2017 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

This is so intimate, it is almost difficult to listen in. Paul is writing to Timothy. Paul was Timothy’s mentor in ministry. Timothy is Paul’s “son in the faith.” Paul and Timothy labored to build up the church together. Paul loved Timothy. And now Paul needs Timothy.

Paul says, *I’m going to be killed soon — the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, but not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearing.*

This past Wednesday was All Saints Day. It’s a day to remember those in the faith who have inspired us, journeyed with us, taught us. I walked through our Memorial Garden and I sat in our Columbarium on Wednesday and gave thanks to God for the friends and saints who were with us and are now with God. They have made us stronger.

This past Tuesday, at our last men’s breakfast Bible study for the fall, we read

this passage together. And the group noticed the hope that Paul holds. He is so confident. Someone asked, “When the time comes, is everyone that confident in hope?” It’s a good question.

Paul’s hope is steadfast. We said last Sunday that hope requires courage. We see, in the apostle, what courageous hope looks like. It’s hard to have a steadfast hope these days. There is so much that erodes our hope.

Of course, Paul had reasons to be hopeless. You can hear them in this text. He’s lonely.

Do your best to come before winter, he writes. And bring my cloak. It’s cold in this hole of a prison cell. Winter is coming. If they don’t kill me first, I might freeze to death, bring my cloak. And bring my books and my parchments. The books are no doubt books of the Old Testament. The parchments were probably the early writings of the church, maybe even some of Paul’s own letters. He yearns to read the story again.

Do your best to come to me before winter. You can hear the loneliness in his pen. Paul says, *No one came to my defense at my trial. Demas left me. Alexander hurt me.*

This is an interesting warning. *Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm. God will pay him back.* It sounds like Paul is bitter. It sounds like Paul is saying, *He hurt me, but God is going to get him.*

But I think something else is going on here. I think this is not a moment of revenge, but a moment of hope.

We don’t know what Alexander did. Maybe Alexander is the reason Paul is in prison. Maybe Alexander has said things about Paul that were not true. Maybe Alexander caused harm to the church, which would have pained the apostle even more. We don’t know. We just know Paul was injured. And he writes to Timothy because Paul knows Timothy would be concerned about that. We don’t like it when our friends are injured.

If I understand the text, Paul is telling Timothy, *God will take care of this, so Timothy, you leave him alone. Don’t try to fix this. Don’t try to set this right. Let God deal with Alexander.*

When wrong has been done, particularly to someone we love, we want to make things right. When injustice occurs, we want to set things right, but sometimes doing so just makes

things worse. There are some wrongs we can't make right. We have to leave them to God.

Carol and I had not been married long. We were still learning each other's families. I was the eldest of four, and Carol was the youngest of four. I noticed that, at times, they didn't fully respect her. They treated her like the baby, even though she was an adult. That bothered me.

So I decided I would fix that. I waded into 25 years of family system, I spoke the truth, I stood up for my bride. I told them how they needed to treat her differently. I don't need to tell you how this worked out.

I thought Carol would be so grateful to me for standing up for her. And her reaction was strong, but gratitude was way down the list. I was right; they did treat her like the baby on occasion. But that wasn't something I could fix.

When something is wrong, and we can fix it, faith calls us to do so; hope calls us to do so. But wisdom requires discerning what we can repair and what must be left to God.

Paul says, *Timothy, this is not yours to fix. Leave Alexander to God.* In this moment, we see Paul's steadfast hope. Paul trusts God to make right that which we cannot make right. There is so much injury in the world. But Paul does not despair. His hope is steadfast that God will make right all that we are powerless to make right.

That is our ultimate hope. When we trust that we are de-

finer more by who we will be than by who we have been, we trust that God will make right that which we are powerless to make right.

So how does Paul maintain such hope? I think Paul's hope comes from looking in the rearview mirror. Paul's hope is tied to his memory. He is not naïve ... there is much pain in his past. There is Alexander and Demas and a host of others who abandoned him when he needed them most. But Paul also makes a list of the people in his life who have been the church to him, who have loved him, who have inspired him. He makes a list of those who have shown him what it means to be a follower of Christ.

He writes, *Luke is with me. Luke is not ashamed of my imprisonment. Luke is courageous, and he gives me strength. And Timothy, bring Mark with you when you come.* It's a sweet moment. Paul and Mark had had a falling out. Once upon a time, Paul had thought Mark couldn't be trusted. But somewhere offstage to us, there was a reconciliation, and now Paul is wanting a visit from Mark.

Greet Prisca and Aquila. They had been missionaries with Paul. They had traveled supporting the work of the church. *Give them my best,* Paul says. *I am so grateful for them.*

And then there is a list of names we know almost nothing about: Eubulus, Linus, Pudens, Claudia. We don't know anything about them, except that

in this moment, when the time of his departure has come, he is remembering them.

Paul is creating a list. He is looking back over his life and thinking of all the people who have inspired him, loved him, walked the journey of faith with him. And because he remembers these people, his hope is strong. His hope for tomorrow is rooted in the love of his yesterday.

The time of my departure has come, but I am not afraid, and there is a crown of righteousness for me. I know that in the end there is only God, and God will claim me, heal me, raise me up. I'm not fearing anyone. I am not despairing. From now on, there is reserved for me a crown of righteousness.

When Paul looks in the rearview mirror of his life, he pays attention to the signs of God's fingerprints that he sees in others, and he keeps the list. There is Luke and Mark and Linus and the household of Onesiphorus. Because he remembers them, he has hope that cannot be shaken.

So I ask you, who would be on your list? Let me invite you to do something this week. Make the list. Find yourself an index card and write down the names of those who have loved you, taught you what it means to follow Christ ... and carry that list with you. I think such memory is the soil in which courageous hope grows.

And once you have filled out that card, I want you to fill out another card — your pledge card. You may not think about

this, but when you support the work of Village Church, you are putting your name on someone else's list. You are inspiring others, loving others, showing others what living defined by hope looks like. Our world is desperate for hope, and Village, you are the most hopeful community I know.

Next year, hope will lead us to increase our mission to feed people who are hungry; to teach children to read and to dream; to stand up for those who are forgotten.

Last Sunday, Mrs. Precious Stargell Cushman thanked you on behalf of 300 homeless children in our city, whom you are lifting from poverty. And this past Wednesday, I saw so many of you joining in the efforts of Front Porch Alliance, partnering in robotics programs and reading programs with students in Kansas City.

In 2018, we will invest about \$1,200,000 in mission. We are living our hope.

Living our hope is what I was thinking as I emailed Anna last week, and I hope she is listening. She is one of our young adults, and she is living in Spain. It's her first time away from home, and she is loving what she is learning — but she misses you. So she watches worship online.

In 2018, hope will lead us to call a site pastor to serve our congregation on Antioch — and I expect by this time next year, there will be over 150, maybe 200 people worshipping in that sanctuary. That's where hope will take us.

We will continue to celebrate the ordination of young adults from this congregation. I talked with another young adult two weeks ago about a call to seminary. In a day when folks are saying all the time that young adults don't care about church and that churches don't care about young adults, well, *you* do. And they are coming here, and some are finding the presence of God so inspiring in this community that some are deciding to give their lives to the service of the church. The purpose of young adult ministry is not seminary, but it's a sign that hope is growing.

And our hope will take us to Shawnee Mission Medical Center and St. Luke's and Children's Mercy and KU Medical Center and Hospice House — and wherever we need to go. Because when things can be healed, we want to give thanks to God; and when things cannot, we want to remember that God knows us by name, and there is a crown of righteousness that awaits.

And in 2018, we will strengthen our ministry with children because in order for them to be defined by hope tomorrow, they need to be loved today. And 15 years from now, some of you will be on their list.

I could go on.

These are hard days in many ways, and it is easy to get discouraged. It's easy to lose hope. So this week, I invite you to find a card and make your list. Remember what God has done for you. And then I in-

vite you to fill out your pledge card and bring it with you to worship next Sunday, so that together ...

We are going to run the race;

We are going to fight the good fight;

And we are going to keep the faith — because the world needs hope, and Village is the most hopeful place I know.

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.