

Sermon Manuscript for “Good News from Golgotha: Our Only Hope”



****The school system in a large city** had a program to help children keep up with their school work during stays in the city's hospitals.

One day a teacher who was assigned to the program received a routine call asking her to visit a particular child named Joey.

She took Joey's room number and talked briefly with the child's regular class teacher.

"We're studying nouns and adverbs in his class now," the regular teacher said, "and I'd be grateful if you could help him understand them so he doesn't fall too far behind."

The hospital program teacher went to see Joey that afternoon.

No one had mentioned to her that he had been badly burned and was in great pain.

Upset at the sight of the poor child, she stammered as she told him, "I've been sent by your school to help you with nouns and adverbs."

When she left the hospital room she felt deflated and defeated.

Had she accomplished anything of worth for the little boy?

The next day when she arrived at the hospital, a nurse abruptly pulled her aside asked her, "What did you do to Joey yesterday?"

The teacher felt she must have done something wrong and began to apologize.

"No, no," said the nurse. "You don't understand. We've been worried about that little boy, but ever since yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back, responding to treatment. It's as though he's decided to live."

A few days later Joey explained that he had completely given up hope until the teacher arrived.

Everything changed when he came to a simple realization.

Joey expressed it this way: "They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a hopeless dying boy, would they?"

Have you ever found yourself in a truly hopeless situation but then have that little ray of light pierce through?

Hope is a light when all other lights go out.

Hope changes everything.

****It's Good Friday. Picture the crucifixion scene for a moment.**

Jesus is on the cross with two thieves; one crucified on either side.

The first thief mocks Jesus: "You said you could save others and now you can't even save yourself!"

He had given up all hope, maybe he was a realist.

Crucifixion was an absolutely final death sentence.

It was a shameful and dishonourable way to die, reserved for criminals and the lowest dregs of society.

He had every right to feel hopeless in his situation.

Suddenly, though, the second thief crucified on the other side of Jesus rebukes the first thief.

The second thief then places his full attention on Jesus.

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He wasn't in denial that things were hopeless.
He knew they would not live out the day.
They were all in the same boat.
But at that moment, at the most hopeless moment, in a day full of bad news, the thief sees a ray of hope.
He rebukes his fellow criminal: “Don't you fear God? You and I are in the exact same mess here. We are getting exactly what we deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

****A change of heart takes place in the second thief.**

Can you imagine what was happening inside this man's heart at this moment?
He confesses his sinful life – “we are getting what our deeds deserve.”
He even acknowledges that Jesus is innocent.
The Holy Spirit was working.
The second thief was repenting.
Perhaps, as he hung from the cross, he realized how completely lost he was.
It's possible he had learned about the Messiah when he was a young boy in the synagogue.
Maybe he remembered the promises of a suffering Messiah, a Messiah that would be mocked.
As he hung from the cross, the Holy Spirit led him to repent, to believe that Jesus was more than just a man.
And then, he turns to Christ, and says, “Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.”
In other words, “I believe that you are more than just a man.
I believe that you are on God's side and I've heard that God shows mercy.
Forgive me for the life I have led.
Forgive me for the way I mocked you.
When you set up your kingdom, have mercy on me.
Remember me.”

And Jesus, even though he had been shown no mercy, shows mercy to that criminal.
“I tell you the truth,” Jesus says, “today you will be with me in paradise.”

Jesus completely and totally forgives him.

He gives a hopeless man the hope of eternal peace with God.

He never prayed a sinner's prayer, never took a membership class and never even got baptised.

He didn't read Purpose Driven Life or go on a mission trip.

But Jesus still welcomed this sinner in.

Because, in this hopeless moment, Jesus was dying for all that man's wickedness against society and against God.

In the middle of suffering for this man's sin, Jesus offers him forgiveness for that sin.

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He gives the thief an unconditional pardon, the sure hope of eternal life.
Jesus extends that same hope for you and I.
At this moment at the cross, Jesus offers you and I an unconditional pardon.
He offers a clean slate, the sure hope of eternal life with him.
All we must do to begin the journey, like the hopeless thief, is to believe that Jesus can do it.
The thief's words of repentance are also our words, aren't they?
As we see Jesus die on the cross, we also pray,
“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.
My Kingdom I tried to build on my own terms is crashing down around me.
Remember me, when you come into your kingdom.”
What did the cross mean for the thief?
It was a symbol of shame and terror and death.
It assumed that he was cursed by God.
It signed his fate as a man with no options, no escape and no hope.
But now, because Jesus is here, the cross takes on a whole new meaning for him.
The most hopeless moment becomes the place of salvation for this man.
The cross is where he meets his Savior.
The cross is where he confesses his sin.
The cross is where he receives a full pardon from the Son of God.
The cross is where he believes and receives salvation.

****What does the cross mean to you and I?**

The cross reminds us that there is good news, even when things are at their worst.
The cross reminds us that there is hope, even when things seem the darkest.
When everything is broken and all you can see is shame and loss, Jesus is still present.
And where Jesus is, there is always still hope.
And that's good news from Golgotha.
We can hope, even when things seem the most hopeless, because Jesus is present.
**If you are facing a hopeless situation today, come to Jesus, come to the cross.
Let's pray.**