

“Hope” - Stephanie Sorge, 12/1/19

Jerusalem - the city on a hill. The place of the Temple of the Lord - God's dwelling place. Both of our readings highlight this holy city and the centrality of that place of worship. Both highlight the call to and promise of peace. As we think about that Holy City today, peace is not a word that we often associate with it. We pray for the peace of Jerusalem, but we do not see it realized.

Is that not the essence of hope? To hope and pray for that which we cannot see? Perhaps even that which seems impossible?

That being said, when these passages were written, Jerusalem was not really a place of peace. Peace was always tenuous. These passages that exalt the holy city and envision peace were not descriptive of their current realities. They were hope-filled in the face of circumstances that could have sunk them into despair. The temple especially was a symbol of their hope. “I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord!”

Gathering together in the dwelling place of God brought the people hope. After the destruction of the Temple and the Babylonian exile, they were in a major crisis of faith. If the dwelling place of God had been destroyed, had that severed God's relationship with the people? Was God no longer with them? It was in the wake of that great crisis that synagogue worship emerged. No longer was there only one place where God's presence might dwell, nor just one place where the people could worship.

Fifty-seven years ago, the group of people who would eventually charter Trinity Presbyterian Church began gathering here. The plan at the outset was to tear down this old house, which was quite run down, and build a church. Can you imagine that? Certainly there are plenty of challenges that come with maintaining such an old building, and we've grown and added on and adapted over the years. But this place is so special. We have so many different people and groups that use it, and I've had many of them comment to me about the great spirit here. It's palpable when we gather to worship. It has an effect of lifting the soul. I can resonate with the Psalmist's words - "I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord!" It's hard to imagine this house otherwise.

The reason we continue to meet in this repurposed house rather than a more traditional church building is that those early members of Trinity knew that a church isn't a building - it is the people of God, gathered together. A sign outside of the front doors states that the church gathers here for renewal. This place has long been known by members not as the church, but as the church house. It is the space where the church gathers together. Perhaps we wouldn't get quite so many compliments on the space if we were in an old store front with no green space. But we'd still be the church gathering together, bound together not by a space but by the Holy Spirit.

The space in which we worship is beautiful, made even more beautiful by the view of the meditation garden, or the front lawn and trees on the other side, by

the banners that we hang each week, by the table that is decorated for the seasons. It's a place where the symbols of grace are central - the font, the pulpit, and the table. Here we are fed, we are refreshed, we are renewed, and from here we are sent out.

I hope that we leave this place with renewed hope each week. Sometimes it might feel like going to church gives us hope. But really, **being** the church is what gives us hope. It's the way that we live into the hope that we have in Jesus Christ.

Our Scripture readings point us towards hope. We light this candle of hope. Neither of these glimpses of hope reflect the world around us, where there are still so many problems, wars, injustice, famine, sickness, hatred, and death. We gather because of or in spite of all of that. We find hope in Jesus Christ, whose final reign we continue to await, and we find hope in this body of Christ gathered together here and now. We do find hope in the church.

Our gathering itself is an affirmation of hope, and the Holy Spirit enables us together to work towards that reign of peace, justice, and love that we await. Both Isaiah and the Psalmist talk about the community gathering together - many people, all the tribes. We witness to and strengthen our hope in the context of community coming together.

When we had our mission celebration in September, and again our calling Sunday in October, we proclaimed that hope. In the face of the many problems

around us, together we are working to bear light and hope and love into the world.

We gather here, and we live into our calls, because we know that hope can't wait.

Echoing the words from our Advent candle lighting liturgy: "I will wait for a lot of things, but I will not wait for hope. I cannot wait for hope, because I want to live with hope—today and every day. I want to roll my sleeves up and get to work—living, serving, giving, and transforming with the hope of a better day. So today we light the candle of hope as a reminder and as a prayer that we might stop waiting and start living, stop watching and start moving. May the light of this candle burn inside us this week—inspiring hope and action for God's promised day. Amen."