

“Is There Hope?”

Isaiah 57:13-21; Romans 8:24-25;
1 Timothy 6:17-21; John 14:1-7, 22-27

November 10, 2013
Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

Tomorrow Land is getting a little worn down. That's what I read in a blog this week: Tomorrow Land is getting a little worn down. It almost felt like a metaphor to me when I read that because there's a certain way in which Tomorrow Land, the future, doesn't seem quite as bright to me as it used to. Maybe I'm just getting older and recognize what's going on in the world. But I wonder about the future. It's an interesting thing to think about. Where are we going? What's it about?

There are a couple of ways to think about it. One way would be to think about the future as being bright. Of course, a lot of movies these days seem to me like they are a little bit more the other way; they seem kind of dark. Are we optimistic or are we pessimistic? Do we think it's bright, or is it dark? All those movies about apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic stuff seem to make it feel a little dark to me. Maybe that's why Tomorrow Land seems a little worn. But it's interesting to think about. What is our perspective going forward?

As I think about the future, I am reminded of some folks these days who suggest we are having a little harder time in general, I think. There's what some people call a hermeneutic suspicion out there. There's this idea that we really can't trust very much. As we move forward in time, what do we trust? Do we trust ourselves? Sometimes if you read somebody like Freud, you can't even trust yourself. It's all about these internal forces that are going on.

What do we trust? Do we trust the system? Or do we trust authority? Or do we just learn to never trust authority but to always question authority, like back in the '60s? We recognize there are a lot of forces on our lives. There are social systems, economic systems, cultural stuff, and of course the environmental system. It all begins to feel really complex. And then, if that weren't enough, I've been reading about chaos theory, which suggests that there are some things that we just simply can't predict, and the weather seems to be one of them. You can predict a couple of days out—three or four or five maybe—but after that it gets really hard to predict because there's too much chaos in it, or at least there are too many inputs, too many butterflies.

It begins to feel a little overwhelming. And even if I begin to look toward the future and think it's bright, it's still opaque. So I try as much as I can to think about where I've come from. That makes an interesting thought. It's as if I've come from the aisle—I've come up the aisle on blue carpet, now I've come up the stairs and I'm still on blue carpet, so I can expect the future to forever be blue carpet. Yet we can look over there and know that it's not. We don't really know exactly what's going to happen tomorrow, do we?

Whether it's bright or it's dark, no matter how much we think we've got figured out, there's always that bit of uncertainty and wonder. In the midst of some of the chaos today I think it's easy to get a little anxiety-prone. We begin to worry about it, to wonder about it. After I looked at that stuff on chaos I thought, how do we ever know what's coming next? It depends on what we trust. How do we go into the future? I could talk a lot about all the things going on, because I think there's tons of stuff going on, but it boils down to what do we trust? I think that's exactly what Jesus is addressing when he says, "Don't worry. Believe in God and believe also in me." Believe. Trust.

I don't know how we go into tomorrow if we don't have something to trust. For me, if I didn't have God to trust into tomorrow, it would be incredibly hard. But Jesus invited us to trust in him. If we begin to notice and see that we can trust in a God that created it all, a God that makes some promises to us—in Isaiah we hear that he is the God who heals; in Romans he's the God who saves. Those go together, and offer real promise. So we have one we can trust who gives us a promise of healing, of saving. Jesus is talking about going before us to prepare a place for us. It is through that promise that we begin to think we can go into the future.

But he doesn't just promise. He shows us the way. He is the way, the truth, and the life. The other side of truth is reality, so in some ways he's saying, "I am the way, I am what's real, and I am what's life." He's inviting us, in the midst of all our uncertainty, to know that there is a way, there is something that is real (true), and there's a life that we can have through trusting him and following him. We have promise and guidance, trust, a way to go. When we have both promise and a way, we have hope. Paul is clear that hope is that thing that we haven't seen, but it's the belief that we have one who has given us the promise and the way.

It's hard to walk into the future. It's hard to do something unknown unless we have some trust that it will be all right, that we can go forward. This guidance that Jesus gives doesn't just say that it will be all right. It says there are some things we can do today. Indeed, it is the recognition that we have both promise and way that gives us hope and the confidence to go forward.

There are so many choices today, so many different things we could do. I could become paralyzed trying to decide what to do if it were just up to me. But it feels to me that through Christ we are shown a way that we have to go. We know that God is with us. It is the promise of the Spirit with us to guide us and give us direction. It's what we do together here. We come together and find the way together through Christ. Because we have hope, we have the confidence to walk together into the future.

If we listen to Timothy, it's more than just hope for the future. In some ways, if I had thought about this when I planned this sermon series, I might not have gone in chronological order with past, present, and future. I might have gone past, future, present because in some ways what we do is live in the present and both the past and the future are a concern. We use the past to try to understand what to do in the present, but we also think about the future and how it influences what we should do in

the present. That's exactly what the letter to Timothy is telling us. It says to do good, to do what Christ has called us to do, to be rich in good works, be generous and share, and then you are building a treasure of a foundation for the future.

It is a way for me to take the wornness off Tomorrow Land when I can allow that God will guide us, and whether or not I know exactly what's coming tomorrow, I know who's with us. If I do today what is good, I'm building a foundation for tomorrow. If I do what Christ has taught us, follow him, he will lead us into what's real. I love the way Timothy talked about it: a life that is true life. So often we ask, "Do I need to get a life?" To follow Christ, he leads us to that life, a life that is true life, a real life. It's not a virtual life. It's a life in which we live today doing what is good. That is, we live out the love of Christ. If we do that, some of the unpredictability doesn't really matter because whatever happens, we will have formed the relationships, we'll have the wonder of that grace and love that we've already experienced.

In the changeability of the world, we have that together. In fact, what's better than that? The changeability of the world is in some ways so that it's not boring. Why would you read a book that was boring? I think about Frodo and his quest. If there were no quest, why would we read the book? But there's a quest we do together, and we're doing that now in the midst of trying to figure out how to be a church together, to do fellowship, to join and work out the ministry that we're called to. There's a real joy that we get to experience and it's been built on the good works of those before us.

I think about Mother Theresa and how, when she first went out on the streets and brought somebody in and tended them, I bet nobody paid attention. But there's an example of somebody who simply did what was good and laid the foundation, an example, for all of us. We're not all going to become Mother Theresa, but we can do the good today that builds the foundation for the future because we know the one who is the way, the truth, and the life. He invites us into a life that is true, real life.

We can't see into the future, but we know the one that goes with us, and the one that goes before us, and the place we will eventually end up, for he prepares a room for us all. Amen.

Lord, it is easy to get caught up in the struggles and violence of this world, and to worry and wonder about what the future holds. Invite us, Lord, again to hold on to you, to know you as the way, the truth, and the life that brings us together and leads us to do the work of fellowship, to do good work, to know the riches of the life you give us, the wonder of love, the shared grace. Lord, you are good. Let us live as those who are your children, following your son into the goodness of the life you give us. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.