

Hope in a Hopeless World
Sermon February 7, 2021

I am going to show you three words.

All three are vitally important for a happy and healthy life.

To make this word game more exciting, I will show you first only the last letters:

...e ...eh

To make it easier, I will show you a few more letters:

.o.e .o.e .a..h

YES, you were right:

Hope, Love, Faith – are absolutely essential for a happy and healthy life.

Please focus on these three words during the whole service. Hope, Love, Faith.

Dear beloved, I have to tell you that I am so exhausted by following the news lately. These days, many psychologists are recommending that we protect ourselves and, for our own psychological well-being, we should NOT watch the news. For months and months and months, we all are overwhelmed about this frightening pandemic: deadly virus, infections, sick people, overflowing emergency rooms, intubation, life support, orange zone, red zone, grey zone, state of emergency, chaos and chaos. Empty churches, isolation, lock down, stay at home order, curfew.

Even our pets are suffering. There's a video on YouTube of a couple lowering their dog down from a second story balcony so that it have a short walk on the grass.

Right now, we are in the second wave but we can expect the third one. Now we heard about two different mutations of this virus: the United Kingdom type and another mutated in Africa.

But can we hide our heads in the sand to protect our spiritual health from anxiety and depression? Would not watching the news bring us comfort and peace?

Many are recommending that we should increase our vitamin intake. I heard, and I would encourage you as well, to increase your daily Vitamin D and Vitamin C intake and take a sufficient amount of magnesium to boost your immune system. But would this still be enough to survive this pandemic with a healthy mind?

People are asking these days. Where is God now? Where is Jesus in this situation?

What do you think? Is God always really in control?

Did you have moments when things did not go so well around you and you thought God is not in control? Did you have moments when you prayed for healing and things went worse, and you thought: why should we believe? Did you have moments when you asked: why did this happen to me?

In the Bible, in Judges, we read about a person called Gideon. He was very upset because horrible things happened to him and his people. One day, God's angel visited Gideon to encourage him. He asked the angel, "*But sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us?*" (Judges 6:13).

We are allowed to ask these questions, but we always should raise them to God with a humble heart, and we should wait patiently for His answer.

We have to learn and acknowledge that, in every situation God is God, HE IS THE LORD, He is our loving and caring father. He will act to help us and we have to wait patiently of Him.

When the people of Israel were afraid of being destroyed by Egyptians, Moses said to them: "*Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.*" (Exodus 14:14)

Today, in our Scripture reading, we see Jesus, the healer. He was healing Peter's mother-in-law. He was healing all those people who came to Him to be healed. He did not send anybody away without providing the grace of complete healing.

How do we pray when we pray for our health? Lord please heal me! Take this sickness away from me and restore me to normal! NOW!!!

Do you think that there are some illnesses which God cannot cure? Then why do you think He does not cure all those ill Christians?

I think God wants to teach us to depend more on Him, to acknowledge His power and strength, but much more, God wants to pull us closer to Him. God wants us to know Him as a heavenly loving, living and giving Father and to be IN HIM. God wants to teach us that life and eternal life are more than health.

If the healing is not coming very fast, sometimes people lose their faith and their trust in God and in prayer. The problem is that, when we pray for healing, we want to force God to help us, as if this would be His obligation. Remember how Jesus Christ was praying in His last hours before the crucifixion. "*My Father, if this cup cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.*" (Matthew 26:42) Every prayer we should conclude as Jesus did:

“Even though if you won’t heal me, even though if you won’t fulfill my heart’s desire, YOUR will be done.”

And what if God’s plan with us is different from ours? What if God does not want to heal us? Then how would we act? What would we say?

In Daniel’s book, there is a great story when Daniel and his friends are told that they might be punished and thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. It is so significant what Daniel said: *“Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, that we will obey our God.”* (Daniel 3:17-18)

The very first question of the Heidelberg Catechism is: *What is your only comfort in life and death?*

“That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him.”

We can have this sacred unity with Jesus Christ even in a hospital bed, at home dealing with tears or sadness, in loneliness, in struggles and in every situation. This unity with Jesus Christ is essential for all of us if we would like to be able to carry our burdens.

Every day, we all need to deepen our connection with Christ Jesus, because we don’t know what the next day is holding for us, or what might be waiting around the corner.

These days, in this world, nothing is safe, nothing is stable, not even our health.

If our Hope, Love, and Faith is up to the weather, or up to the people who surround us, if it is up to our health, then this can be horrible because all these things are changing quickly. The only steadfast rock in our lives is Jesus Christ. If He is present in our lives, He can give us strength and we can keep our balance. He can give us His peace and we will be able to conquer and to feel happy and blessed.

Hope, Love and Faith always comes from a right relationship with God. Hope, Love and Faith will give us peace even in a bad situation. Hope and Love are not gifts of God, but these are fruit of our Faith. If somebody will come into a deep and personal relationship with God, the person will receive the grace of God, the strength which will keep them calm even during a pandemic.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul says: *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* This is not Paul’s desire, but Christ’s expectations from you and me.

Rejoice prayerfully, because you already received so many things from God. God never promised to us that if we will pray then we won’t get sick, we won’t have any health issues. He never said that those people who believe will have no problems. But he promised that He is with us every day, in every second. This means that God sees us, He knows what is going on in us and what is happening to us. And this has to be enough for us.

Sometimes the Lord will challenge our faith to make it stronger. He can hear our prayer but He will intervene ONLY at the very last moment, to see if we still love Him.

Remember and never forget that *“those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”* (Isaiah 40:31)

Are you actively clinging to the hope that Jesus Christ came to bring us? Or are you being overwhelmed and drowned by troubles and uncertainty?

If you are surrounded by the pandemic, are you still trusting and relying with your Faith upon His Love? Pause today and renew your Hope in Him! Give Him your difficulties and battles again and rest in the promise that He is bigger than any of our earthly troubles.

Paul said: *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:38-39)