

# Sermon: Pentecost 12

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Year C

Genesis 15:1-6

Psalm 33:12-22

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Luke 12:32-40

Paul reminds us... that faith is the assurance of things hoped for... the conviction of things not seen... and we are assured of many things we do not see... we have faith... for example... that the sky will darken this evening... and hope is like the vision in Proverbs... which keeps us from perishing... hope is the essence of life... it is the grace which vibrates around us... it is the One which has become many... and the many which are One... hope brings new life...

And as United Church of Christ Minister Daniel Schultz wrote: Hope is the fear mingled with thrill... at taking your place among the adults. Hope is another spring... the fullness of creation's generosity pushes out on the ash tree leaves that shudder in the warm sun. Hope is the worms that digest the soil... over eons... breaking mountains down into hills and hills into plains... the haze rises... the world shimmers and awaits the first thunderstorm of summer. Hope is the adopted son... the grafted inheritor... prone to wandering on his single-speed bike—he of three homes before finding his forever family... Hope is the rabbits who share space under the fir... ignored by the leashed dog... their hearts wanting nothing more than a blade of grass or a tulip petal... they run at the slightest sound... the gentlest motion... it is the most human thing they do...

Hope is Robert Frost's dimpled spider... fat and white... waiting for a moth in the night... wise bridesmaids are not the only ones who prepare...

Hope awakens... has a smoke... and wonders why... why now... when the great-grandchildren are just starting to get big... she went down hard... fought to the very

end... died on a warm day in the spring... but hope is the little sister who twirls on the cemetery grass... the big sister who leaves a sprig of lilac on her tombstone... the seeds that germinate above the cement vault...

Hope is the horizon... the Lord loves those who wander... loves the lost... loves apostles broken down by the side of the road... God spreads his seed far and wide... hoping that some will come back to him someday... the disciples pray to be the chaff and burn rather than expose themselves to the Messiah's demands... Hope the knock that comes in the middle of the night. Hope is the meat of life... he said...

When we have hope... we wait in anticipation... we clear the decks and usher in the thing we want... the thing we desire... the thing we hope for... with our mind... with the impulse of our telekinetic power to make things happen and move... and joining in with our will... providence moves too...

We are not caught off guard by hope's arrival... we are ready... even though the phone rings with the same ring it always has... we know this ring is different... even though the mail carrier's truck is the same truck it always is... we know this is the truck that brings our package... even though this dinner... at this restaurant... is... from all appearances... the same as many other meals we've eaten there... this time it's different... we're going to ask our partner to marry us... and we've dressed for the occasion...

Jesus urges in many passages... and in today's Gospel... to be ready... to be dressed for action... and to have our lamps lit... Jesus doesn't mean that we should be ready for our spread in GQ or Vogue... to be dressed for action means to have your loins girded... to be ready to move... to be ready... perhaps for battle... but not necessarily physical battle... but the inner battle against the things which keep us from being ready... and perhaps the hope we have for things which God does not want for us...

Having our lamps lit doesn't mean fresh batteries in the flashlight... it doesn't mean a full gas tank in the generator... it means our inner light... inner awareness... being able to look around us and really see what's going on... to read the signs around us... being girded for truth telling instead of just being polite... being ready to trust the conviction and hope of our faith... the way Abraham did when God took him outside... in the cool desert... where the air was so crisp and dry... the sky above so transparent... that the stars seemed so close that you could reach up and touch them... more like sand on the beach than metal-melting burning furnaces light years away... and these... this many... God said... would be Abraham's descendants... and Abraham's confidence in God's promise was so faith-filled... even though... when he was called to set out for the place that he was to receive as an inheritance... even though he did not know where he was going... he was so faith-filled... that God deemed him Holy...

But sometimes... the things we hope for are not meant to be... and for irrational reasons... we deny what we see... we minimize what we know to be true... we fight against ourselves... we may not have put on the inner garments we need... our inner light may not have reached full brightness... or we get tricked by what we see in the shadows...

I remember the hopeless-ness I once felt during therapy... I had constructed a haven of certainty and denial for myself... where I could be safe and miserable at the same time... but I had one of those earworms... from a 1984 song... *I can't fight this feeling any longer*... I remember the tears I shed... because the thing I hoped for... was not meant to be... it did not give as much life... as the thing I hoped was not true... and as I girded myself spiritually... as I prepared to take risks I had never taken... I found deeper faith and new hope... and there are two stories that help illustrate faith and hope...

In her book... [The Other Side of Silence](#)... author Margaret Silf writes: the question of risk... is really the question of faith... the journey into the unknown future is a journey for

people of faith... not necessarily people who have aligned themselves with a particular faith *tradition*... but people who are willing to trust in a power beyond themselves...

Unfortunately... for many... the word faith has become associated with certainty... not risk... and the world does not offer certainty... if we construct a haven of certainty for ourselves... we can be sure that we have constructed an illusion... experience will almost always shake that haven apart just... when we most need it...

The story goes... that there was once a daredevil who made a living by pushing a wheelbarrow... across a high wire... suspended across an abyss... the crowds came out in droves to watch him... and cheer him on... *Do you believe I can do it?* he would ask them... *Oh Yes! We believe you can do it...* they chorused back in acclamation... *So who's going to get in the wheelbarrow...* he asked... and silence fell... they all believed in him... but none of them really trusted him enough... to get in the wheelbarrow...

And in his book... *Our Greatest Gift*... priest and theologian Henri Nouwen... tells a true story about his friendship with the Flying Rodleights... a family of trapeze artists... one day... as the leader of the troupe and Henri were talking... he said: *The public might think that I am the great star of the trapeze... but the real star is Joe... my catcher... he has to be there for me... with split-second precision... and grab me out of the air as I come towards him in the long jump...*

*The secret... he said... is that the flyer does nothing... and the catcher does everything... when I fly to Joe... I have simply to stretch out my arms and hands... and wait for him to catch me... the worst thing the flyer can do is to try to catch the catcher... a flyer must fly... and a catcher must catch... and the flyer must trust... with outstretched arms... that his catcher will be there for him... [this is faith...]*

When Nouwen heard this... he said... the words of Jesus flashed through my mind: *Father... into your hands I commend my Spirit...* this is true at the time of our death...

but it's also true during our lives... when we're faced with challenge... do we let ourselves relax into being caught... or do we fight against our circumstances and try to catch the One who is there to catch us...

When the passenger in the wheelbarrow hopes that the daredevil can push her across the abyss... when the trapeze flyer has hope that the catcher will catch him... and when they are assured that they will... then the conviction of their faith becomes their trust... but it can sometimes be hard to trust... especially if we have really been... or have simply felt betrayed... and the world is such... that what is important to us... can never be equally important to every single person we meet... I wonder how many Earths... there'd need to be for that to happen... but we can be so grounded in the Ground of Being... we can be so illuminated by the inner Light of Christ... that we can hold on to those things which give life... and know when to let go of the hopeless things we once hoped for... and trust God more than we think may be possible...

But even in those situations when we experience doubt... if in a moment of weakness... if we make the mistake of thinking that it's all up to us... and reach out... and try to catch our Catcher... and mess things up... and begin to fall... we can still have faith too... we are assured too... that the net of God's love... is woven together so strongly... and is so expansive... that we can fall from any situation... we can fall from our fear... and it will never fail to catch us...

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