

Tuesday, August 11, 2020

Hope does not disappoint us....

- Pastor Hank French

Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (Romans 5:3-5).

These are difficult times—no question about that. And in difficult times it is tempting to give up hope and slip into despair, if not depression. This pandemic has sickened and killed far too many, and far too many are grieving the loss of loved ones and are fearful that more loved ones might be lost and the leader of the country shrugs and says, "They are dying. That's true, and—it is what it is."

Jobs have been lost and income gone, but food still must be bought and rent or mortgages still need to be paid. Health insurance has been lost with the lost jobs, but people still get sick or injured and fall into deeper financial distress. Financial pain is all too real for all too many and the government which could ease the pain is immobilized with partisan bickering, finger-pointing and incompetence.

As the poet W. B. Yeats wrote in his poem *The Second Coming* in 1920, following the chaos of World War I,

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is lost
The best lack all conviction, while the worst are filled with passionate intensity.

So it sometimes seems, but I refuse to surrender to either cynicism or despair. Faith sees things realistically but hopefully.

Thomas Merton, one of the great spiritual writers of the last century and one of my spiritual mentors, wrote: "You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. *What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope.*"

This pandemic has laid bare many of the systemic and institutional structures and behaviors that keep us from being all that we can be as a nation. We do face many challenges in this present moment but within those many challenges there are many possibilities waiting to be embraced "with courage, faith and hope." Possibilities to fashion a more compassionate and caring society where no one falls through the cracks. Possibilities of leveling the playing field so that no one is denied opportunities to thrive physically, mentally and spiritually. This is a vision to embrace "with courage, faith and hope."

And as Paul reminds us, “hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us,” and it is God’s love poured into our hearts that enables us to boldly embrace “the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment.”

Prayer: Holy God, you whose love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, guide us in living your love as we confront today’s possibilities and challenges. Amen.