

Friday, May 22, 2020

May you abound in hope

- Pastor Hank French

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

Shortly after I finished Japanese language school I was assigned to be the associate pastor of a small Japanese congregation in western Japan. My Japanese was OK but by no means perfect—I still had a lot to learn.

About the second or third time that I preached, the theme of my sermon was hope. Standing in the pulpit, I looked out at the thirty or so people gathered for worship and said, “Christosha wa nezumi o motte, shoorai ni mukeru koto ga dekimasu. What I thought I was saying was that Christians are people who face the future with hope. That’s not what I actually said. Nobody reacted, nobody smiled, nobody laughed—until later.

After the service was over an elderly woman who had lived in Hawaii for many years and spoke good English leaned over to me and whispered in my ear, “Did you really want to say that?”

Puzzled, I asked her, “What did I say.”

With a mischievous glint in her eyes she replied, “You said that Christians are people who face the future holding onto a rat!” Instead of saying “nezumi” which means rat, I should have said “nozomi” which means hope. Now they were laughing, as was I!

Well, the story got around and I was soon known throughout the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church as the father of rat theology! But that didn’t stop me from preaching often about hope.

Christians are indeed people who face the future with hope. Amid the uncertainties of life we place our hope in Christ, trusting that both in this life and in the next life our hope will not be disappointed. As we journey through life, hope sustains us, gives us courage to keep on keeping on and focuses our faith on the grace, love and promises of God.

Hope is one of the three primary marks of a Christian. As Paul insisted, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). Faith produces hope and hope leads to love—the chief mark of a Christian.

Prayer: Thank you holy God that you have filled us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.