SUNDIE MORNING SISTAS

Keep Hope Alive!

During some of the darkest days throughout the struggles for justice and equality in this country, the disenfranchised were reminded by a well-known civil rights activist to "keep hope alive". As I ponder the tribulations that many of us are facing today, the meaning of this quote becomes even more poignant and relevant. Hope is a burning quality that resonates from the deepest part of us. It ignites our greatest expectations and thrusts them into the machinery of possibilities. If the energy of this very necessary feeling is not awakened within us, we are lost indeed.

A great many of us are in this "lost state" where life has taken a lackluster tone and we ourselves are filled with doubt. The rate at which problems seem to be piling on our plates makes us anticipate the worst and we forget what it means to be hopeful, but somehow we've got to see past our circumstances and keep our groove swinging. You must understand that your condition is not your conclusion. Saying this isn't enough, you've got to know it so deeply that your heart rejoices at the mere possibility of where life will take you in Christ.

Hope and faith are not the same things. Personally, I always think of hope as the fuel or backbone of faith. You've got to have hope before your faith can take off and produce results. The dictionary defines hope as the feeling you get when you sense that what you want can be had or that events and experiences will turn out for the best. It's the feeling that no matter what comes your way, you'll get through it somehow. Faith, then, is the mobilization of your thoughts towards your expectations. So to hope is to feel as though things will work out for your good. To have faith is to have a more certain and focused vision of what you want; so much so that you actually visualize your victory. You feel it in your soul so strongly that you begin to take decisive action on the victory that you know will soon be yours.

Said another way, Hope puts you in the ballpark, but faith puts you in the game. You see, you may not know who will hire you or where you'll be working this time next year, but you must use every thought to focus on a successful outcome. You don't know how your future husband will come to you, but you must remain hopeful in spite of all the toads you've kissed.

In the Old Testament book of Ruth, we find a very good example of how and when feelings of hope are employed wisely. We read that Naomi had not only lost her husband, but both sons. By all accounts of how women were treated and viewed at that time in history, without a husband or a son, a woman's fate was precarious to say the least. There were so few options available for a woman, and were it not for her committed and faithful daughter-in-law, Ruth, Naomi's survival as a childless widow would be dependent solely upon the kindness of strangers.

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Naomi felt that the Lord had dealt her a harsh hand, and that the best thing for her to do was to send her daughters-in-law back to their mothers. She wanted them to have a chance to secure a future for themselves and marry again. One can only imagine that Naomi must have been a compassionate and caring mother-in-law, for when her son's wives heard her suggestion, they wept and said in Ruth 1:10 (KJV) "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people."

Ruth 1:12-13 (NKJV)
"Turn back, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me!"

This mother-in-law did not consider the possibility of having more children a hopeful one. In her wisdom, she would not encourage her daughters-in-law to hope for her to have sons, wait until those sons were full grown, and then present them to the young women as prospective husbands. She surely could have bated them to plunder their futures on such a hope, just so that they would remain with her and keep her from being alone, but she did not act selfishly in this regard. Naomi said, "IF I should say I have hope..." This means that she could have placed her hope in such a notion, but she wouldn't do that because in her opinion doing so would not have been wise.

Naomi was wise not to cast her hope in the wrong direction, and she endeared Ruth to her all the more. As the story goes, we know that Ruth chose to be committed to Naomi, for she said in Ruth 1:16 (NKJV) "Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God." Ruth was steadfast in her resolve and Naomi lovingly obliged her.

We are creatures of habit, you and I, and hope is a natural inclination. Some of us are feeling low and sad right now because we are denying ourselves this pleasure. We hoped before and were disappointed. We were disappointed not because our blessed Savior let us down, but because we hoped in the wrong thing and our faith wouldn't line up with it. Naomi went home to Bethlehem and ended up casting her hope in the right direction. God had a plan for her life and she got on board with His purpose. That's when she began to witness results not just for her, but for Ruth as well.

Ruth was a faithful woman, obedient to her mother-in-law, and God rewarded that obedience by allowing her to marry Boaz. There's no doubt about it, every single time we follow His plan, we will witness positive results—every time! But sometimes we forget that. We place our hope in the man instead of in the fact that Jesus will make everything all right. We place our hope in the job instead of in the fact that God is our sufficiency. Listen, nothing—no person and no thing—is big enough, powerful enough, to keep hope alive, only the love of Christ can do that.

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Psalms 31:24 (NLT) tells us "So be strong and take courage, all you who put your hope in the Lord!" When your hope is in Christ, you can have courage through the storm. It might look as though you are surrounded by devastation and the people around you want to shatter your peace, but you won't give into the pressure. Those who do not believe in the goodness of God will try just about anything if it means they will have quick pleasure, but those in whom the spirit of Christ resides are strong. We don't give in because we have hope in Christ, that's why we won't fall for quick pleasures when things look their worse.

So don't falter and squander your birthright by feelings of self-pity, doing so places you in danger of drawing circumstances, people, and events that resonate with that hopelessness. This is in direct opposition to what Christ has accomplished for us. He is our hope; therefore we cannot be flighty or waver in our convictions. We must be well-grounded in hope, realizing that Christ is the evidence of our expectation. Without him there is no hope; without him hope is dead because there is no guarantee of victory—no certainty of a positive result, but with him our hope is fulfilled.

Colossians 1:27(KJV) says "To whom God would make known what [is] the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:" All that could be accomplished HAS been accomplished in him, and he's our Savior, our Redeemer, our Lord! And he's in us! The hope of glory dwells within all of us who have been born again! So recognize that you can win! Don't look outside...look within...it is there that you'll find hope alive and thriving.

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