

Rejoice in Your Hope

A Message by James R. Newby

Text: Romans 12: 9-13

Writing to the early Christians in the Church at Rome, the Apostle Paul, as in all of his Letters to the young churches, seeks to encourage them and advise them. In the midst of his advice he says, in Romans 12, “Rejoice in your hope...” This is an encouraging word for a group of Christians who were constantly under attack, not knowing from day to day if *the powers that be* would be disrupting their worship, breaking into their homes and taking them away to be executed, or brazenly tortured. “Rejoice in your hope...”

For the early Christians, the basis of their *hope*, for the most part, resided in their belief that Jesus Christ would return, in the flesh, and free them from bondage to Rome. Those who gathered together in those early churches had little but *hope*. Mostly, they were a rag-tag group of society’s misfits and expendables—the poor, the

unclean and the dishonored. Never having experienced the kind of day to day existence that they did, we might find it hard to know how splendid these words sound... “Blessed are the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.” Perhaps one would have to experience the constant loneliness of the permanently unclean to know how powerful and transforming a simple invitation to a dinner table could be. But now, their Lord had been crucified and they felt alone, hiding in fear, and doing the one thing that gives them the strength and courage to continue living each day: *Rejoicing in their hope...*

I am in the process of teaching a class on Quakerism. Each time that I share about how the early Quakers were imprisoned and suffered for their faith, I think about the *hope* that they must have had to survive the kind of torture and abuse that they experienced at the hands of those who just happened to disagree with their theology. In her book, *Witness, Warning and Prophecy: Quaker Women's Writing from 1655-1700*, Teresa Feroli writes in her

Introduction about my distant cousin, Margaret Newby. I have shared this with you before, but since my family pride is so great, I am going to share it again: "In November of 1655, the Quaker Margaret Newby invoked a near riot as she preached in the West Midlands town of Evesham: Newby writes, 'I did speak amongst the people, and a friend did hold me in her arms, and the power of the Lord was so strong in me, and it cleared my conscience, and I was moved to sing...one of the townspeople said that if we were let alone we would destroy the whole town.'" On this occasion the mayor of Evesham prevented Newby from "destroying the whole town" by putting her in the stocks. It was a cold November night, and Margaret fell sick from the exposure, and shortly thereafter she died. She has been memorialized in the Quaker *Book of Sufferings*, and recognized as a martyr for her Quaker faith.

Andrew Delbanco is a professor at Columbia University in New York. He wrote a book titled: *The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope*. In that book he says what we all know is true,

that from time to time in our lives we get the feeling that all of the random experiences and sensations and events that we call living, do not really add up to anything. That our lives are just meaningless. We always live at the brink of this chasm of meaninglessness where, with just a nudge, we might tumble into melancholy and despair. “Why am I here?” “What has my life meant?” “What is the purpose of it all?” Hope, says Delbanco, is about *the stories we tell that help us make meaning out of our lives...The stories that restore to us our sense of purpose and worth, and make our life worth living again.*

As we enter the last few weeks of a difficult election season, we all know that we can use some hope right now. The tribalism that we find in politics, the racism, the sexism, and the constant stoking of our cultural divisions have taken their toll. On all sides of the political spectrum there is a growing self-righteousness and judgmentalism of people who live on their perceived certainties, never acknowledging any form of doubt that critical thinking and

reflective thought would help us find. Name your own sense of hopelessness...*We know that we can all use some hope.*

A study published in *Global Epidemiology* from Harvard's *Human Flourishing Program*, found that people who had more hope were in better physical health, had healthier behaviors, and better social support than the participants who lived with less hope. The study goes on to state 6 ways that we can foster hope in our lives: *1.*

Positive Thinking...Try not to dwell on negativity and do things that spark joy. 2.Engage in a religious or spiritual community. Prayer and meditation can bring peace of mind and increase hope. 3. Practice Forgiveness...Let go of pain by being forgiving...Forgiveness allows you to nurture hope. 4. Seek Inspiration...Listen to your favorite music...Paint a picture...read inspiring quotations...Deepen hope by keeping yourself motivated to reach greater heights. 5. Choose a hope mentor...Martin Luther King, Jr., the Dalai Lama, even George Fox. Finally, 6. Help others...You will feel more hopeful if you help others in need.

And so, where can we find some *real* hope...A hope that will last and give our lives meaning?...A hope that is life giving and life sustaining? Let me focus on number 2 of the six ways I just read:

I am convinced that much of the answer to the question, "Where can we find hope?" can be found in the gathered community. For those gathered here this morning, this means Cincinnati Friends Meeting. *We are one of the institutions in our society whose primary purpose is to help people maintain hope in their lives. When people have no hope, we discover hope together. When we cannot *discover* hope, we *create* hope together. Cincinnati Meeting is one of those places where we can go for some hope when other institutions in our society disappoint us.*

I want to close this message this morning with that wonderful and hope filled quotation from our founder, George Fox, which he wrote while he was in prison...words that are familiar to many of us: "Sing and rejoice ye children of the day and the light; for the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt; and the Truth

**doth flourish as the rose, and lilies do grow among the thorns and
the plants atop the hills, and upon them the lambs do skip and play.
And never heed the tempests nor the storms, floods nor rains, for
the seed of Christ is over all, and doth reign. And so be of good faith
and valiant for the truth..." Or, in the words of the Apostle Paul,
"Rejoice in your hope."**