

## **“Feeling the Squeeze”**

**John 16:16-24**

**1/24/10**

*“You will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.”*

That is Hope.

The past couple weeks we have heard about hope—the hope God gives to us in all His creative power through Christ. We celebrated hope as we remembered Rob Combs and his life and what God did through you to serve him, knowing that our work for Christ is never in vain, but always life-changing.

Last week we talked about our problems—that we all have them at some point in life. And no matter how dark the day may be, God is always present, ready to help us through and transform how we think about it all.

Hope.

We begin to see what hope looks like, feels like, knowing that this world is not a perfect place, but full of trials and pain. And yet, Jesus speaks these words to us:

*“So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”*

Hope.

One full week after the magnitude-7 quake killed an estimated 200,000, left 250,000 injured and made 1.5 million homeless, search-and-rescue teams were emerging from the ruins with improbable success stories. Experts have said that without water, buried quake victims were unlikely to survive beyond three days.

Ena Zizi had been at a church meeting at the residence of Haiti's Roman Catholic archbishop when the quake struck, trapping her in debris. On Tuesday, she was rescued by a Mexican disaster team that was created in the wake of Mexico City's 1985 earthquake.

Zizi said that after the quake, she spoke back and forth with a vicar who also was trapped. But after a few days, he fell silent, and she spent the rest of the time praying and waiting.

"I talked only to my boss, God," she said. "And I didn't need any more humans." Doctors who examined Zizi on Tuesday said she was dehydrated and had a dislocated hip and a broken leg.

"I'm all right, sort of," she said, lying on a foil thermal blanket outside the Cuban hospital, her gray hair covered in white dust.

Hope.

Tragedies come, people hurt, we feel the pain of sin in the world, and the prick of thorns and thistles as we go about our work. The world is not a perfect place.

And so our questions rise to God. Questions of why evil persists, of why these things have to be, why, when I am trying to do my best everything still sometimes goes wrong.

The Bible tells us of others throughout history who have asked such questions, such as why the evil people in the world seem to prosper while the good ones die. Psalm 73:12-14 says, *“Such are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and am punished every morning.”* Pretty intense cry to God.

Life does seem to be unfair at times, when we hear of children who die, or a godly person who is killed needlessly. Probably all of us can point to something we know of, perhaps something you have experienced personally, and wonder why such a terrible thing had to happen.

But hear again Jesus' words: "*You will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.*"

**Hope: God will turn your pain into joy.**

1 Peter 4:12 tells us, "*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.*" Suffering would be a much larger problem for us if the Bible promised there would be none. Because there is no getting around the fact that suffering exists.

But over and over again we see and experience the real-life hope God pours into our hearts.

The Zizi's who rescuers find a week later, still singing and praying.

Romans 5:1-5 tells us, "*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that 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.*"

**Hope does not disappoint.**

And that is our call as the church, to be carriers of hope.

**We are to be carriers of hope.**

In a world where we know pain exists, do we live like God exists?

In 1963, Kurt Vonnegut wrote a book entitled *Cat's Cradle* in which the narrator and main character, John, sought to write a book about the day the world ended.

Vonnegut was prompted to do so by the nuclear bomb at Hiroshima. His fictional story deals with the technological ability of the human race combined with its stupidity. Within the story, in the process of his research and travels, John comes across a chapter in a book related to his new religion. The title of the chapter is, "What Can a Thoughtful Man Hope for Mankind on Earth, Given the Experience of the Past Million Years?" It doesn't take John long to read this book because it consists of only one word followed by a period: "Nothing."

Vonnegut's book reveals what many in our world today think—there is no hope. Incidents like the earthquake in Haiti, the genocidal activity found in many countries in the last couple of decades, and the daily death rates of HIV patients cause people to question where the hope is. Does Christianity have anything to say in this situation? Does the church have a message of hope in the apparent hopelessness?

*Terry G. Carter, "Preaching God's Word" (Zondervan, 2005), p. 28-29*

The answer is seen in those hygiene kits to be sent to Haiti that you bought and will assemble.

The answer is seen in building a home for someone in need like you did for Rob.

The answer is seen in the work you continue to do in the south, rebuilding lives after Hurricane Katrina.

The answer is seen in our brothers and sisters who labor for peace in violent communities around the world.

The answer is seen, sitting right here this morning—the church gathered together. Why? Because in some way God has moved in your life and has made us His people in Christ and said Here is the Light in the darkness.

On one level it is easy to talk about the eternal hope we have in Christ. What I mean is, we do have eternal hope. We know this is not the end of all things, here and now. You can kill this body, but that only frees me from it to live with God in perfection.

But people need to know there is hope now. People need to know that, here in this place, amidst the pain and tragedy, there is reason to keep living.

There is something in us that must be shared. We are carriers of hope.

The Mendoza church in the Dominican Republic gathered together on this first Sunday following the earthquake in Haiti to grieve and comfort one another in the face of the terrible losses. The church is part of the Church of the Brethren in the DR.

Many wept as the congregation sang in Haitian Creole, "When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll." One woman fell to the floor in a convulsion of wailing and sorrow. The gathering felt like a mass funeral service given that most of the 400-plus members were grieving personal losses and also the collective story of so many deaths of loved ones in Port-au-Prince.

Many have still not heard news of their loved ones and are terribly worried. Others know of injuries and destruction of family property.

Psalm 46:2-3 says "*We will not fear, though the earth give way...and the mountains quake*". This was Pastor Ernst Merisier's text as he comforted his grieving congregation. "God is our stability (refuge and strength) in an unstable world," he said. In this world, everything is unstable and unworthy of trust. "Nevertheless," he said, "we can put our faith in the salvation offered through Jesus Christ because He is 'rock-solid.'"

Hope.

1 Corinthians 13:12: "*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face.*"

Yes, there will be a day we understand all this perfectly. But for now, we must show the world that hope does not disappoint.

In *Our Greatest Gift*, Henri Nouwen tells a parable of faith and hope. He imagines twins—a brother and a sister—talking to each other in their mother's womb:

"The sister said to the brother, 'I believe there is life after birth.'

"Her brother protested vehemently, 'No, no, this is all there is. This is a dark and cozy place, and we have nothing else to do but to cling to the cord that feeds us.'

"The little girl insisted, 'There must be something more than this dark place. There must be something else, a place with light where there is freedom to move.' Still, she could not convince her twin brother.

"After some silence, the sister said hesitantly, 'I have something else to say, and I'm afraid you won't believe that, either, but I think there is a mother.'

"Her brother became furious. 'A mother!' he shouted. 'What are you talking about? I have never seen a mother, and neither have you. Who put that idea in your head? As I told you, this place is all we have. Why do you always want more? This is not such a bad place, after all. We have all we need, so let's be content.'

"The sister was quite overwhelmed by her brother's response and for a while didn't dare say anything more. But she couldn't let go of her thoughts, and since she had

only her twin brother to speak to, she finally said, ‘Don’t you feel these squeezes every once in a while? They’re quite unpleasant and sometimes even painful.’

“‘Yes,’ he answered. ‘What’s special about that?’

“‘Well,’ the sister said, ‘I think that these squeezes are there to get us ready for another place, much more beautiful than this, where we will see our mother face-to-face. Don’t you think that’s exciting?’

“The brother didn’t answer. He was fed up with the foolish talk of his sister and felt that the best thing would be simply to ignore her and hope that she would leave him alone.”

*“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face.”*

*“You will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.”*

Amen.