

## Portions of Hope: Lessons from the Lead Presbyter

In late December I reminded the Presbytery of the conversations that I had with the Lead Presbyter Search Committee where the theme of hope had shown up and I invited you to join a hope focused conversation. In case you missed it here are the words of that original invitation. –

The Holy Spirit continued to weave hope throughout all of our time together, each interview and conversation. So this is where I will begin my work as Lead Presbyter, over the next few months. I want us to engage in a broad conversation about hope – to think about what the Bible has to say about hope, to think about the role of hope in the Good News of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, to think about the ways hope undergirds our ministry and mission.”

I do not know about you, but I continue to be surprised by the work of the Holy Spirit. At the top of my “to do list” was my plan to gather a list of scriptures, books, articles, pod casts, and more on hope. Most Stated Clerks have mad skills in process and plan building. I do not know if my skills are “mad”, but I am totally on board with a good plan. I have a file on my computer titled, Hope Resources. I even began the January staff meeting with a devotion on hope. I was gleefully checking off boxes on my plan. I am not going to commit blasphemy and suggest that the Holy Spirit ruined my plan, but let me say that my plan was interrupted when the Holy Spirit kept turning my attention to the question, what is hope?

As I reflect on that question, I am reminded of a statement made by DeEtte Decker who led the retreat in December for the Leadership Team and new committee chairs. She began her time by sharing that hope is a positional statement. What? She went on to state that hope is a muscle that gets stronger with use. What? She challenged these Presbytery of West Virginia leaders to answer the question, is my life marked by hope? Again, what?

Back to my awesome plan for a moment. In keeping with what I have been taught about best practices in Bible study, I had started a list of scriptures about hope and was set to do a word study on hope. This would become the basis of today's article.

The story that keeps coming to mind when I think about hope is the resurrection story, especially the post resurrection appearances of Jesus. These stories start with the disciples and followers of Jesus in hiding because they are afraid. Their grief, the loss of Jesus, is overwhelming. They can see no path forward. They have no hope. The familiar Road to Emmaus story begins with the disciples unable to think about what is next, without Jesus they can see no path forward. They have no hope. Yet we know that as disciples encounter the risen Christ, they begin to see the path forward as those who believe in the risen Christ. The resurrection story is THE story of hope. It is the basis of our declaring our belief in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ which changes our lives. It is the basis of our saying that we are called as individual disciples into the work of God's kingdom, to witness to our communities of our faith. The resurrection story is THE story of invitation into the conversation of what hope is.

This story calls us from our own places of fear and hiding – grief, life changing illness, a changing world, churches with less people, less energy, and less money. It is a story that challenges us to look back to the Israelites being led by Joshua. Remember Joshua 1: 6-9; the passage includes the words, “Be strong and courageous”. It is a story that invites us to be resurrection people. What is hope?

Resurrection people, Jesus Christ is our hope. He invites us to abide in this hope – to explore what hope means for the Presbytery of West Virginia and its churches. God is calling all of us to be strong and courageous – to abide in Christ, accept the mantle of hope and do the work that God is calling us to do together. I invite you to join me in this.

To easily find remarks from our Lead Presbyter and Moderator, please visit our website, select the communications tab, and tabs for Portions of Hope: Lessons from the Lead Presbyter and Monthly Mod Musing are available under Pieces of the Presbytery.

