

***Lenten Sermon Series: Surprised By Hope***  
***“Hope of the Salvation”***  
***Genesis 1:26-31; Psalm 2; John 5:25-29; Ephesians 2:8-10; I Corinthians 15: 20-28***  
***Salem United Methodist Church***  
***March 30, 2014***  
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During this liturgical season of Lent, we have been Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church from Anglican Bishop N. T. Wright’s book, “Surprised By Hope.” We have talked about “The Hope of the Resurrection,” “The Hope of Heaven,” and “The “Hope of Jesus’ Second Coming.” We may be asking, “So what?” We will attempt to answer this question as we explore “Hope of Salvation.”

The verb, “to save,” means to rescue. When someone is in trouble or danger, our first response is to rescue them. This week in Houston there was a construction worker who was trapped on the fourth floor of a burning building that was under construction. Fire fighters were able to save him from the fast spreading fire. In Oso, Washington, many have tried to rescue those who were in the mudslide in Washington State, but despite their efforts only a few have been saved. One of the frustrating things about the disappearance of Malaysian Flight 370 is that we have not been able to rescue anyone. Rescuing or saving others seems to be in our DNA. When children are stranded on frozen ice, when someone falls into rushing water, or are trapped in a car accident, our first response is to figure out a way to save them.

The United Methodist Church is in the saving business: both the physical type and the biblical one. The United Methodist Committee on Relief responds to disasters both in the U.S. and around the world. They have been there for victims of Hurricane Sandy, for Syrian refugees, and for those whose homes were destroyed in the Philippine typhoon. One person asked, “Why do you do this?” Because United Methodists are people of hope. When there is a need, we respond. One might ask, “Does this work really help?” Yes, with the money that is donated, people can receive money to help with home repairs and volunteers from various United Methodist congregations come to assist in clean-up and repairs. Today we celebrate One Great Hour of Sharing. This is a special offering that offsets the overhead expense for the United Methodist Committee on Relief. If everyone just gave a few dollars across the denomination their overhead would be met. The United Methodist Committee on Relief is the agency of the church that provides hope to those who have experienced natural disasters or political upheaval. Saving others brings hope. Saving others physically is trying to bring God’s Kingdom of order, love, and justice on earth.

The work of the church is also about a biblical saving. Because of United Methodists distributed bed nets to prevent malaria which saved thousands of lives, we have been asked by village leaders to build six new churches in a predominantly Muslim area of Sierra Leone. Physical saving can often lead to biblical saving. What is biblical saving mean? The word, “save,” in Latin is *salvatio*, but in Hebrew it is, *yeshu'ah*, which is the Hebrew way of saying, Jesus. He is the one who saves. Jesus saves us from something and for something. Yes, Jesus rescues us from sin and death. When God created humanity, God called it “very good.” God’s original plan for us was not death. We were created to live forever, but our disobedience to God got in the way. So now we experience death. Many view salvation as getting right with God today so I can live eternally with God in heaven when I die. N. T. Wright offers us a more complete definition of salvation which is similar to John Wesley’s definition. Their definition of salvation is based on the writings of Paul. He wrote to the Ephesians that there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation. There is nothing we

can do to save ourselves. Salvation is a gift. We cannot save ourselves. We must depend on God to give us salvation and God does. In addition, Wright, Wesley, and Paul would argue that salvation is a process. One could say that we are always in the process of being saved. God with the Holy Spirit saves us in this life to bring us to faith and then leads us to follow Jesus in the path of discipleship. Our salvation is a gift from God who plans to do good things in our lives. The Holy Spirit works within us to transform us to want to be like Jesus, to do good things in this world, to work at saving this world hell bent on destroying itself. We become people of prayer, holiness, hope, justice, and love. We who are in this process of salvation are actively being a part of working with God to make salvation of the world happen in the present and the future. This is what God saves us for.

When one's life is saved from a disaster, that person may ask, "What was I saved for?" "Why am I getting this second chance at life?" Often the one who is saved from the disaster will take his new lease on life as a new start, a new beginning. Often this person will search for what this new beginning is supposed to be. I have an example of this. There was an older man who had been in the church all his life, but he was a very negative person. He had no joy in his life. No matter what anyone wanted to do in the church to work for God's Kingdom on earth, he always had something negative to say about it. "Oh, it will never work," or "We tried this before and it didn't work." No one wanted to be around him. He brought everyone down. Then one day he had a massive heart attack and was taken to the ER. I was called to be with him and his wife. When I got there, he told me that he didn't believe he was saved and he wanted to know that before he was flown to Washington Hospital Center where he would have bypass surgery. So we prayed and then he was flown to the hospital. When he got home from recovery, I received a call from him. He wanted to know why God gave him a second chance at life. He wanted to know, "What was I saved for?" I told him that I didn't know, but I suspected that God wasn't finished with him in the process of salvation. In his recovery, he began to read the Bible and other spiritual books. He would get so excited about his discoveries and would call me to share them with me. After he fully recovered, we all saw such a change in his behavior. Mister Negative turned into a cheerleader for God. He was the one coming up with ideas for how the church could be introducing God's Kingdom to our community. He became an ambassador for Christ, talking to anyone who would listen to him about how good God is. He was inviting people to come to church and they actually were. The transformation in him was unbelievable. I told him that God had given him a both new physical heart and a new spiritual one. God in Christ is in control. God gave new life to this man and through him others received new life as well.

In a few weeks we will celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. Our literal death came through Adam's and Eve's disobedience to God. But Jesus died and was resurrected to inaugurate our new life, to destroy our death. He has this authority. He can destroy the sinfulness in us that destroys God's kingdom on earth and can heal us so we can be workers for God's kingdom. Jesus saves us from our sinful nature, from our death, and from evil in this world. As we receive the gift of salvation, as we grow in the process of salvation we are called not to retreat from this world, but to embrace it by doing what is right, by bringing joy, beauty, and healing. N. T. Wright states, "Salvation is not 'going to heaven' but 'being raised in life in God's new heaven and new earth.'" He also states that, "We are not saved by good works but saved for good works!"

**Reflection Question:** How might your life look different if you committed to do good works for the glory of God on a regular basis? In your marriage? In your workplace? In your church? In your neighborhood? In some place you go regularly?

**Resources:** *Surprised By Hope* by N. T. Wright; "One Great Hour of Sharing 2014"-  
<http://vimeo.com/87607843>

