



First United Church of Oak Park

Immeasurable Hope

Ephesians 1: 16-23

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The Book of Ephesians is actually a letter — a piece of correspondence between the faithful. Written no more than a few decades after Jesus' life, a letter such as this one, which we call the Book of Ephesians, is something like a window into the past. It highlights the concerns of the faithful in a certain time and place, their joys and triumphs, their losses and grief, the transitions in their leadership and their struggle simply to continue moving forward. And in Ephesians, we read advice, advice about how to face into a new age with faith, and righteousness, righteousness which is one single word that also means justice. When the world has transformed underfoot, how can a community of faith be faithful and do what is right, that is, what is just? That is what the book — well, the letter — of Ephesians is about.

And at its heart we see that it has to do with hope. The faithful are called to know the hope to which God has called you. It is a remarkable thing, this little phrase. What the faithful are counseled to do, what makes them who they are, what they are as a community, is hope. And it is not mere ordinary hope, either, nor is that hope something that is grounded in themselves, or in anything they can see in the world. Instead, the faithful are told they are being called to a hope of immeasurable greatness.

How are people supposed to do that? How can a people follow after hope, build life around hope, live life around hope that is so great it cannot be measured, cannot be encompassed and encapsulated by the mind? What would hope even be that could not be reduced to data points or subjected to metrics? Hope that is measurable is at least theoretically achievable. Hope that cannot be measured? That is something different entirely.

That other hope, that immeasurable hope, the Book of Ephesians says it has its grounding in the resurrected Christ. The greatest military power the world had yet known — Rome — the power of Rome could not contain Christ. The power of the Roman emperor to instill obedience through force, this power was as nothing compared to the power of Christ to inspire joyful righteousness through hope. Christ, the Book of Ephesians tells the faithful, Christ is above any worldly ruler. Above, too, any way of organizing life that holds people down. The supposed right of men to rule over women — the supposed right of religious authority to dictate to others how they ought live, the supposed right of one people to lord it over another — all of those things are revealed to be illusions. Christ is above all rulers, all powers, all means of organizing human living, so that the faithful are not bound to follow those things. The faithful are free, free to live in pursuit of that immeasurable hope, of a world utterly transformed. That is the

grounding of the righteousness, righteousness which is one single word that also means justice.

And people who are living that way — whose lives are ordered around hope, who live seeking after hope and subjecting any way of life that calls upon them to the test of hope, people who live in that way — that community is called the church. That is what the church is. A place that recognizes Christ as its ultimate source. A body with Christ as the head. A people gathered up from anywhere and everywhere, gathered up and bound together and held together by placing Christ at the head, immeasurable hope, striving toward righteousness, which is one single word that also means justice.

First United Church of Oak Park, we are not the entirety of the church. After all, the church is all people living and dead and yet to be alive who set Christ as their hope, in this age and the age to come. We are not the entirety of the church, but we are the church. We are a body of people, a community with Christ and the immeasurable hope of Christ as our head, the sole head of the church. And Christ is above any power, any mode of organizing life, any structures.

This will at times lead us to oppose and resist unjust laws, because the mere existence of a law is not sufficient to inspire fealty to that law from the church. If the law of the land opposes justice, then Christians are called to resist that law. It is not merely powers formalized in government, either. White supremacy, too, is a power of the world. A power that is far below Christ, who looks at the heart, not the skin. Environmental devastation, too, is a power of the world. A power that is far below Christ, the Word of God, through whom all of this good earth came into being. Christ is above all means of organizing life, of stratifying people, of carving the world into haves and have nots.

And in this — immeasurable hope — hope beyond comprehension, Christians are free to live according to the hope for true racial equity in this country, a rebalancing of the scales of injustice, a repair of the centuries-old original racist sin of this country. Christians are free to live according to the hope for true global environmental sustainability, a world that can look centuries ahead and see flourishing life. Immeasurable hope, hope that we know for certain we cannot achieve on our own, because those hopes that we can achieve on our own are paltry, tiny, measurable things. And we the church, in this age and the age to come, we follow Christ above all things, all laws, all powers, and with hope grounded in the resurrected Christ, we the church, our hope is boundless. Thanks be to God.