

**Mark 8:27–38**

I hope it will be safe to sing soon. I've been thinking a lot about hope lately. I've talked with a lot of people these past few weeks who don't have much.

As I was driving back from Idaho and Washington this past week, I was listening to some old southern and Appalachian hymns, on a couple albums by Anonymous 4. Listening to the hymns of the rural poor, I was struck by how much they held on to hope. Our hymns are wonderful, full of deep theology, and wise teachings. But the hymns of those who had nothing, and expected nothing to change, were hymns of hope,

“Bear me away on your snow white wings, to my immortal home.”

“I am a poor wayfaring stranger, a wandering through this world of woe,  
but there's no sickness, toil, nor danger in that bright land to which I go.”

“Some bright morning when this life is o'er, I'll fly away.”

“My God he calls me, he calls me by the thunder,  
the trumpet sounds within'a my soul,  
and I ain't got long to stay here.”

The examples go on and on and it's really hard not to sing.

Those Tennessee rock farmers, share croppers, and enslaved people, they knew a hope we can't understand. You see, we have the power to improve our situation, by wealth or influence or vote or science, we can make our world better. But they could not change theirs, and so they learned so much better that we have to hope for the next. They learned that their suffering would one day end, and everything would be OK.

I need us all to hear that again. This is a terrible time we are living through. It will end. It will be OK. For now though, it is not as it ought to be.

We all have our own ideas of how the world should be, and those of us with power and privilege try to create it.

Jesus and his disciples stood in Caesarea Philippi. Translated, it means, King Philip's Caesarville. It was a Roman town built by the powerful, as a place of power to ingratiate themselves to the even more powerful. It was full of statues of impressive people. It was a seat of the Emperor's cult, and a center for the worship of Caesar. It was in a region called Panaes, dedicated to the Greek god Pan, the god of nature, and in some sense, all creation; the word Pan meaning “Everything”. Memorials and monuments were everywhere, King Philip, the tetrarch, even had his image on the city's coins. It was a place that reeked of power, patronage, and privilege.

Amidst the trappings of Roman power and Emperor worship — in effect, standing among congressmen and bureaucrats, and monuments to George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln surrounded by tobacco, oil, and pharmaceutical company lobbyists — Jesus thought “this ought not to be,” and looking at the statues around him, asked, “But who am I?”

When Peter answered him, “the messiah,” he thought that Jesus would change the world, tear down the statues and pagan temples, and set himself up as king.

But Jesus knew that ought not to be. The whole system of power and domination was broken, and would never be fixed. The world can never be fixed. Righteousness does not always win.

Isaiah knew it and wrote about how God's righteous servant would suffer. It ought not to be. But it cannot be changed.

James knew it. Tongues can never be tamed, they always have and always will bless in one moment and curse in the next. It ought not to be. But it cannot be changed.

Jesus knew hope had to go deeper than the next election, the next scientific discovery, the next movement. Hope had to go through suffering, the cross, and tomb, and into a different kind of being altogether. Because this world is not and will never be as it ought to be.

During this time, even white people in the most privileged country on earth, are learning that the world is not as it ought to be. And no amount of power can change it.

I am so tired of waiting for it to change. At first I thought surely it would all be over by Easter 2020. Or maybe by Pentecost, then there was a vaccine and I thought the end was in sight. Finally this summer, for a few weeks we could take our masks off. And now....you all know the story and the frustration and the despair as well as I do.

So here's my suggestion. Stop waiting for the world to be perfect; it will never happen. Don't stop trying to change the world, to improve lives and ease suffering, but push your hope out a little.

Keep trying to help those who are in pain, but don't expect perfection. Stop trying to run out in front of Jesus trying to perfect the world. Get behind him, and follow him through this little piece of suffering, with your eyes on the real prize. Follow the examples of the poor and the enslaved whose backs carry our privilege, lose the privileged world's hope that "we can do it if we stick together, believe in ourselves, and raise enough cash," and live in the hope that Jesus Christ has already done it.

And sing your hope out for the world to hear.

O who will come and go with me, for I'm bound for the promised land.

Ere we reach the shining river, lay we every burden down.

We shall mount above the skies when we hear the trumpet sound in that morning.

Sing out the name of this church and the Name we follow with every breath.

Look around at the powers and privilege and brokenness of the world that you cannot change, and ask Jesus the question, "Who do you say we are?"

Then ask the powers, "Who will contend with us? Where are our adversaries? Who will declare us guilty?" We are the baptized, our home is over Jordan, we have already died and been buried with Christ and his resurrected life awaits us.

Remember that every time you feel the spirit, every time you share your hope, the world feels the hope of resurrection, resurrection that is offered to all, unearned, eternal, not more of the same, but life as it ought to be, life where all are welcomed, and privilege and power are meaningless, and righteousness rewarded instead of crucified, life with no politics or pandemics, life where we can open our mouths and use our tongues to sing God's praise and never curse again.

I hope it will be safe to sing again soon, I know it will happen, if not here, "when I get to heaven, gonna sing a new song, gonna shout it all over God's heaven.