

## “Dum Spiro, Spero (While I breathe I Hope)”

Jeremiah 29:10-14, and reading from Michael Ben Zehabe, Song of Songs

### **Field of Dreams**

I have been reminded of one of my favorite movies that came out in 1989 with actor greats Kevin Costner, James Earl Jones and Ray Liotta. It was a movie that was adapted by a 1982 novel entitled *Shoeless Joe*. Do you remember the movie? Yes, Field of Dreams. The storyline is about an Iowa farmer named Ray who hears a mysterious voice one night in his cornfield saying "If you build it, he will come." The farmer feels the need to act. Despite taunts of lunacy, Ray builds a baseball diamond on his land, supported by his wife, Annie. Afterward, the ghosts of great players start emerging from the crops to play ball, led by "Shoeless" Joe Jackson. But, as Ray learns, this field of dreams is about much more than bringing former baseball greats out to play. It is about hope.

It is a hope that leans forward despite the risks – a hope that is connected to our past and present realities. Learning from where we have been, especially from our mistakes or missteps, and pressing forward with a vision for what seems unlikely and impossible and even outrageous. It is a story about the sometimes elusive opportunities – to seize those watershed moments of our lives that call us to go big or go home. As Pastor Scott mentioned last week, it is about making peace with our fundamental wounds and seeing them as our gifts to each other.

### **Seizing the Day (Overcoming)**

For Christians, it has been said, *Hope* is the "New Year's Day of the Soul." There is in the human heart a yearning for significance, a dream that life is more than we have yet experienced, a hope that life will ultimately win out over death, and that love will outlast it all. The great question of christianity is not, "Will you go to heaven?" But rather, "Have you seized the opportunities to live your hope? Have you been touched by Jesus in such a way that you are committed to building a new future?"

As that great healer, Helen Keller, put it, "The world is full of suffering. It is also full of overcoming it." You and I share a strong sense of "passion for the possible." Almost two years ago, I became restless and began wondering if I had a future at Southminster. There was, if you remember, a lot of conflict in this place and the future seemed dim. I witnessed many many families leave our church and the children's and youth programs, which was heartbreaking to say the least. Ministry increasingly felt like an uphill battle in this place. And I simply wondered whether my gifts would be better used elsewhere.

But as Bertrand Russell wrote, "Extreme hopes are born of extreme misery." It is almost two years later and I feel the heartbeat of Southminster in a way that seemed distant just a while ago. Yes, there are still wounds from our past, but what a transformation it has been. In a year and a

half of pastoral transition, in the midst of a pandemic which left us physically apart, we committed to build our community once again – to build a plane in the sky. We trusted in our future. We trusted that they would come. We never gave up hope.

As Christopher Reeves, also known as "Superman," put it so passionately from his wheelchair, paralyzed with a broken neck: "Once you choose hope, anything is possible."

### **Dum Spiro, Spero (When I Breathe, I hope)**

Friends, I am a Christian "Pan-en-theist," This view very much informs the way I view the world and certainly hope. I believe that God creates life and we come from God and we return to God. At death, life is changed, not taken away. I believe that God is not "out there" somewhere; God is "in here" with us, in the makeup of every cell, every motor neuron, every thought, every emotion. And I believe that our hope lies in entering more fully into the Mystery we call God...and having the faith to build our dreams for an equitable society. Regardless of what religion we follow – or none at all – I believe that this is the one hope that unites most of humanity: equity and inclusion for all.

From my seminary days, I learned a bit of Latin. Not much. But enough. I have to tell you that I was surprised to receive my diploma from Princeton Theological Seminary and it was written entirely in Latin. I had a year and a half of Hebrew, a year and a half of Greek but no official Latin class. But I do remember some phrases here and there and one that I will always cherish and live by is: "Dum Spiro, Spero"... "While I Breathe, I Hope"

Having hope doesn't change anything, it makes us want to change things. It's true of medicine, of poverty, of war, of racism, of hate, of immigration, of the environment...of everything. Just saying, "I hope things work out for you" is a cop-out. Nothing is going to work out in the future without someone doing something different, something better, in the present.

### **Build It and They Will Come**

Martin Luther King lived that dream: "We must accept finite disappointment," he said, "but we must never lose infinite hope...If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all."

Without hope, you lose the courage to build. "If you build it, they will come". They say that they built the train tracks over the Alps between Venice and Vienna before there was a train that could make the trip. But they built it anyway... Because they knew the train would come! I know that train will come!

In one of our conversations last week, Pastor Scott and I talked about one of the most influential people in our growing faith as progressives. I brought up Henri Nouwen, the Dutch priest. His

book entitled the “Wounded Healer” was required reading in Seminary for both of us. Let me close with one Nouwen’s poems entitled *Hope*:

*"Hope means to keep living amid desperation, And to keep humming in the darkness. Hoping is knowing that there is love. It is trust in tomorrow. It is falling asleep and waking again when the sun rises. In the midst of a gale at sea, it is to discover land. In the eyes of another, it is to see that she understands you. As long as there is still hope, there will also be prayer, and God will be holding you in God's hands."*

Friends, indeed: Dum Spiro, Spero (While I breathe I Hope).

**A-men**