

“Your Redemption Draws Nigh”

Sermon by Dan Harrison, pastor at Church of the Covenant, Lynchburg, VA 10/18/20

Luke 21:25-33

Anytime there is clearly an oppressive cloud filling the sky, a feeling of doom intoxicating our senses and pulling us into despair, we are excited by the idea of redemption... the idea of hope eternal. Who wouldn't be? This act of redemption in our minds is not temporal; most of us believe in this eternal, permanent, infinite hope. Even within most of our ancestral beliefs there are imbedded stories of redemption, of hope. This burning concept of ultimate liberation is a common thread among most of our own life-stories (it's what often keeps us going). I'm reminded of Jesus' parable that when a person finds a treasure in a field (a field they don't own, by the way), that this person will go and sell all that they have to raise the money to buy the field. The treasure is worth everything they have. In the same way, when we stumble upon some glimmer of hope, some way to find redemption either in this life or the next... if we really believe it is possible, if it is tangible, edible, consumable, plausible, and realizable—then we pause what we are doing and gather and divert resources to it. Why? Because it is filled with hope. Because it offers redemption.

What is redemption? There are several Greek words in the Christian Scriptures that are translated into the English word *redemption*, but the overarching concept rests on a very basic principle: *Deliverance*. The idea is relatable to a slave having their freedom bought by someone else: A gift of freedom. This liberation is often intertwined with the Christian concept of *grace*. There are however differing degrees of belief surrounding culpability. Grace denotes receiving something undeserved. Redemption, however, does not necessarily carry with it the same connotation. In fact, scripturally we can all arrive to an understanding that such freedom is in fact deserved by all. Our very humanity beckons for a freedom as does all of Creation. Agency and freewill are part of our design; however, we naturally fall into synchronism with the rest of God's Creation, a united rhythm, a naturally flowing current. This reunification, or as many of us know it as the Hebrew concept *Tikkun Olam*, is a powerful aspect of our energies drawing close to one another like magnetic force, and in so doing we automatically draw closer to God.

So, I pose to you a series of questions. Do you see gloom and darkness all around you? Are the politics of the day, the systemic corruptions, and obvious injustices filling your eyes and ears, disheartening you one news cycle after another? Is the isolation pressing in on your fragile being beginning to tear away at your communal spirit? Do you weep when you see the destruction of once vibrant forests and woodland animals, changing the very eco-systems that God gave us to nurture and love? Does your heart grow heavy when you think about the world your children's children will grow up in, the one you've left them with, and how incongruent it is to God's plan for love and hope? Are you ashamed to call yourself a Christian because of what that title seems to embody here in this country and around the world? A label that too often reeks of judgmental hypocrisy and oppressive domination? But in that darkness of gloom and destructive behavior, do you find a glimmer of hope breaking through the trees above us? Do you somehow find a moment where even a small chance of hope has a way of pushing away the darkness all

together? Do you pray for redemption? Do you pray for deliverance? I do! God knows I do, nearly every day... That like the days of Jesus we will embrace this simple truth the Kingdom of God is here, it makes its home in us. When we gather in peace and hope, the world bends its ear to listen. When words of love and mercy escape your lips, people's dark clouds dissipate. You are redemption!

You may ask, "Who me? How can I be "redemption" when I myself don't feel free?" I answer simply with this, "It is not a feeling, it is a truth?" You are not bound to the darkness that surrounds you. Jesus said you are the light of the world, the city on a hill, the salt of the earth. You are redemption embodied, and you have the power to redeem others. You may respond with, "Only God can do that." I say to you in response, "You have the power, in your words and deeds, to redeem your fellow human beings." But how? Jesus said the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that is planted and grows and grows into a great tree where the birds themselves find refuge. You are the redeemer incarnate, Jesus' very hands and feet. Do not shift this work to God alone. God had chosen to work through you. Redeem your fellow captives with your words, with your thoughts, with everything you are. You have found the treasure of freedom, of hope, and many of you have sold all that you have to go and acquire the field where the treasure has been buried... and that treasure is the mustard seed that grows into a large tree to provide refuge for the world. Redemption draws nigh as the kingdom of God draws nigh, because you draw nigh.

Shalom