

This Sunday's texts:

Acts 1:12-26

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

John 17:1-11

The Miracle of Hope

Pastor Joe Hill

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Our Gospel reading for today is from the Gospel of John, chapter 17, verses 1 through 11:

After Jesus said this, He looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify You. For You granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given Him. Now this is eternal life; that they know You the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave Me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began. I've revealed You to those whom You gave me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your Word. Now they know that everything You have given Me comes from You. For I gave them the words You gave Me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from You, and they believed that You sent me. I pray for them. I'm not praying for the world, but for those You have given Me, for they are Yours. All I have is Yours and all You have is mine. And glory has come to Me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name, the name You gave me, so that they may be one as We are one."

This is the Word of the Lord. So today is a very exciting day for us as a church, as we begin our new partnership with Dream House and for me especially as a pastor and having been the first point of contact between Dream House and St Timothy's. Well, actually I guess the Fish Food Pantry was. This is a ministry that was all born out of a connection made through the Fish Food Pantry, but I've seen this pattern before. In the past, I've had times in my ministry, where I've had a question in front of me and no answers. I've prayed, "God, what do you think?" I was praying about opportunities for local mission connection for our church and that's when I got a phone call from a member of our church that volunteers at the food pantry who said I have somebody I would love to introduce you to. I thought this has happened to me once before. One time I was praying for the very same thing and somebody called me up and said Joe I have somebody I would like you to meet. They went on to introduce me to Pastor Scott who leads Cham

Deliverance Ministry and the Mercy Mobile which has become now, in its seven or eight years since then, a very fruitful ministry partnership. I suspect that we will see the very same thing with Dream House as we look forward.

Today, it's my pleasure to invite up one of the women who is a resident at Dream House, Cynthia. She's going to come up and share some of her testimony of what God has been up to in her life. So please welcome up Cynthia!

Hello. Good morning everybody. My name is Cynthia Galindo. I'm 22 years old and I'm also a single mother to a 5-year-old baby girl. I'm also an immigrant here in the United States since I was 10, if I remember correctly. So life hasn't exactly been easy for me from the moment that I came here. For us immigrants, they like to call it the American dream, that you pursue when you get here, but, really, my life has been at least as a childhood until just about a year ago kind of painful. It was a painful childhood. I was sexually harassed in my own home by a family member for five years non-stop. I left my home with my ex-husband, thinking that I loved him, but, in reality, I now know that I left because I was trying to run away from that. I moved out when I was 16 and with having no love still, I was still looking for something. My life wasn't fulfilled even when I moved out of my parents and I thought I had left all that behind. I still felt so empty. Everything that I once had a passion for was gone. I was just a straight-A student my whole life, thinking that I could get somewhere, but then reality checks come and it's like "Oh, I'm not born here. I don't have the same possibilities that everybody else has" So that just put me in a reality check of where I wanted to go with my life. So I became pregnant purposely at the age of 16 and had my child at 17. I remember being talked about a lot, those judgments that come with being a teenage parent, that you ruin your life and that you're not going to do well. But thanks to God, I beat the odds. I'm now graduating next week from college. I believe it was God who sent me. Not that it was an easy way to get my paperwork because I had to suffer violence here in order to get a visa and try to get my paperwork set up. But I now have the opportunity, like the rest of my friends, to build a life here for my daughter and for me. So even while being with my daughter's father, it was painful. I stayed there for six years. It was a violent relationship and next month now it'll be a year since I separated. I'm so happy where I am today because it wouldn't be possible without the help of God and the help of Dream House. I left in June of last year. I was not homeless, but I wasn't in a stable place. I was kind of going back and forth and with my child, it was really hard. She would ask why we couldn't live with her father. I didn't know how to explain to a little 4-year-old that Mommy just couldn't take it anymore because it got to the point where he

almost killed me and that's why I left. So after three stressful months of just looking around, one of my counselors from high school actually connected me with Miss Caroline and Miss Nelly. I was in desperate need to leave already. I think I had about a day or two left where I was living because I was getting kicked out. I didn't know where to go next. Miss Nelly contacted me and she was like oh well you could move as soon as you want to. That just made me realize that God was really listening to me. Dream House has been such a loving and supportive system. I never dropped out of school once because I knew where I wanted to go and because I now have that support system for me and my daughter, a place to stay. I know that I'm safe and I don't have to worry at least for a little while until I have to find a place, but by then, hopefully, I'll have all my paperwork straightened up. I'll be able to get an apartment for me and my kid. In the meantime, I'm just at Dream House and I'm saving up and trying to make my dream come true. I am now studying, getting my Associate [degree] in psychology and sociology because of all this drama that I went through right now, I want to help others who were in the same place as me. I want to become a family and children's therapist and just help make a change where it could have been in mine. So thank you to this church for all the help that you have brought and thank you to Miss Nelly and Miss Yay for helping the house make a home. I really do love being there and it's been an amazing path. I'm just hoping to be there a little longer. That's my story and how I met them. Thank you.

{[Joe Hill:] Cynthia, thank you so much for sharing some of your story, with the hardships, but also the reality of God's faithfulness, that his handprints are all over your life. And it's not done. I'm excited to see what God has in store for you and for the rest of the women at Dream House. It's interesting. It's such a great reminder of that scripture we've read today in 1 Peter, that even in hardship, we can have hope.

God never promised us that this life would be easy. In fact, the scriptures actually assure us that the opposite will be the case. 1 Peter 4 says "Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange was happening to you." Sometimes it's easy to think that difficulties come to us. We experience them. It's like "Wow! I'm alone in this." But the reality is that difficulties in life are not weird. They are not the exception. They are so often the norm for us. Life is filled with challenges and while Peter in this text is specifically talking about the trials that we may face in this life because of our faith, the entire first letter of Peter is a story of hope in hardship from front to

back, of the challenges that come in this life and the reason for hope that we have.

Now at the beginning of this Resurrection Power sermon series, Anna-Marie started us off by talking about the Living Hope that we have in Jesus Christ. We have hope not because it is wishful thinking about things we hope to happen in the future, but we have a hope that is firm and secure because Jesus was risen from the dead. We actually see in Jesus Himself an example. His life was not cushy. He was well acquainted with trials and challenges and opposition and suffering, even though He lived a perfect life. That is exactly why we can have hope in the midst of our challenges because Jesus is proof that sin, evil, struggle, those things do not invalidate the power or the mercy, or the goodness of God. Jesus went to the cross and on that cross, He died a horrible death. Then He went to spend what I suspect were the three loneliest days in all of human history, in that tomb. He descended to Hell itself. He took the worst that the enemy had to offer, pain, suffering, rejection, betrayal, loneliness, and death itself. And then He rose again. He was victorious over all of it.

And when you are His, when your faith and your trust are in the Risen Christ, then His victory is your victory. So your hardships, they're not a mystery to Christ. He sees you. He's there with you because He's been there before. The promise of the Christian faith is not that life will be easy. The promise is that the tomb was empty and that our Redeemer lives. That trial, the hardship, the death that Jesus faced was not the end for Him. And it is not the end for you either.

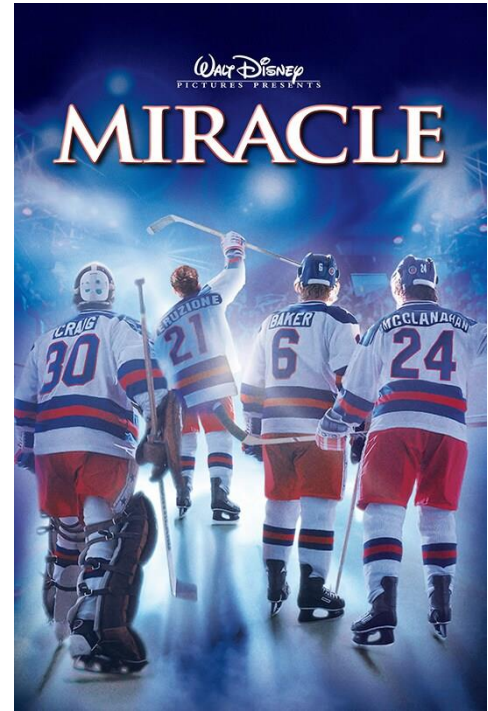
So Peter says don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal you're facing as if something strange were happening to you. Hardship is natural in this life because we are in a humanity broken by sin and we live in the reverberations of sin in the world around us. The truth is that every time that holiness comes into contact with sin, there is friction because the darkness does not like when the light shows up. "And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ [Jesus], after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast."¹ The promise of Christ is not a life free of fiery ordeals, but of a Savior who stands with you and sustains you in the fire.

If you're still here today and the reality of your life right now is that it is a fiery ordeal, it is a hardship, it might feel like the valley of the shadow of death. But if you're still here today, then you know that your story is not over. Jesus is with you and you have reason for hope. And you have reason for hope because the victory was already won when Jesus won it on the cross.

¹ 1 Peter 5:10-11

One of my favorite movies is *Miracle*. It's a classic. It's about the 1980 US men's Olympic hockey team and their defeat of the Soviet team at the Lake Placid Olympics. It was an American team, made up of college students, going up against a Soviet team made up entirely of professional hockey players. This was a Soviet team that had not lost a single game in 16 years, four consecutive gold medals, all of this at the height of the tensions of the Cold War. It's a great movie. If you haven't seen it, where have you been? One of the things that I love about this movie, super interesting to me, is that it came out in 2004 which meant that before anybody had ever even seen it, we had all known how it was going to end. No spoiler alerts with *Miracle* because we learned the ending in 1980. It's been 24 years. That didn't mean that the movie wasn't an emotional roller coaster. It had high highs and low lows. What it did mean was, at least for me, as I watched the story, I could experience the highs and the lows a little differently - with expectation, with anticipation. As I watched that dramatic scene of Coach Herb Brooks in the locker room, giving his speech before that big game, he says, "Boys, if we played this game ten times, we would lose nine of them. But not today!" As I hear those words in that movie, I do not hear wishful thinking. I hear hope because we all already know how that game ends. It was a game that was won 43 years ago.

And that, my friends, is the life of faith, that is the life of resurrection power, knowing that the game was won 2,000 years ago, and that on the other side of the cross is an empty tomb. It's knowing that on the other side of the desert is the promised land. It is knowing that our hope is firm and secure and that nothing can take it away because 2,000 years ago, the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. So we can have the confidence and the faith and the trust in God to look at those nine out of ten situations and say "Not today," because we know how the story ends. So it's not wishful thinking. It is not blind faith. It is the miracle of Hope that Christ has conquered sin and death. He has conquered the power of the devil. And by faith, that victory is ours. There was a tomb that could not hold Jesus down. Do you believe in miracles? Brothers and sisters in Christ, wherever you're at today, whether things are good or you're in the middle of that fiery ordeal, you can face your hardships with hope because



you know how the game ends. Find your strength and your hope in the risen Christ “and the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. To Him be the power forever and ever. Amen.”²

² 1 Peter 5:10-11