

Bishop's Message to the Diocese

March 20, 2020

As we begin another weekend living through our self-quarantine, and our virtual worship, one of the things that's come to me, and really been thinking about this all week, is a passage from Hebrews chapter 10, verses 32-34, in which the author of the book reminds those who have been going through a trial, a persecution, that they have a hope-filled faith, and that is this hope-filled faith that has allowed them to respond to the difficulty in their own life.

The wordplay that is going on in that passage is one about the difference between substance, those earthly things, and basis, that which all things come from. As he's playing it out, what he talks about is how those who have been persecuted let go of the worldly dimension of their life, the regularity of their life, their possessions, all of these kinds of things, their substance, if you will, and relied instead upon the God of their faith, their basis, Jesus Christ, the foundation, the cornerstone.

As I was thinking about that and realized how we, all of us, are going through this trial and this time in which things feel like sand is moving under our feet and the regularity and normalcy of a daily schedule, routine, work and family life has all been changed as we come to be confined in our homes, we need to remember that it's actually not any of those things, the regularity, the normalcy, the substance, the work, the wealth, all of those things. Actually, we have a hope-filled faith that buoys us up at moments like this.

I've been amazed over the last couple of weeks as I've watched you and your leaders, the clergy of the diocese, reach out to people to re-engage on phone trees and video calls and video conferencing, to pray, to worship, to do Bible studies, to live out the life of Christianity in our homes. We need to remember that we come from a long line of individuals, of Christians, who prayed in caves and homes and huts as persecution and plagues and war ravaged their land. They, too, were filled with this hope that buoyed them up past the kind of substance of things, and they found that they could rely on the basis of all things God in Christ Jesus.

So I encourage you in this time. I don't know what the next few weeks will bring. I don't know how this virus will continue to spread across the United States or even in our own diocese or in our own towns, but I know that it will not defeat us, that we have an amazing faith, a hope in God that will deliver us through this time, and that nothing can separate us in this moment.

I want to leave you with one last vision from scripture. That is the disciples who were huddled as a stormy sea raged around their boat. Can you imagine that in that moment they were feared for their lives, that everything was over, that the boat was surely to sink, and in the midst of that great storm Jesus appears to them across the stormy sea and calms their fears and their anxieties.

This is the kind of basis for a hope-filled life that we rest upon. More than that, as we reach out, as we call people, as we gather in all of the different ways that technology allows us to in this time, facing this virus and all that's being thrown at us, let us realize that we, as C.S. Lewis said, are the little Christs, We are the ones being sent across the stormy sea to calm the fears and anxieties of those around us, those who even fear for their life, and to offer them the hope-filled faith that we have.

May God bless you, God make His face to shine upon you. Blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you this day and forevermore. Amen.