

Summer Fruit: Voices of Hope

A sermon preached by
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Texts:
Proverbs 12:14a
Romans 8: 15-25

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Proverbs 12:14a

From the fruit of the mouth one is filled with good things.

Romans 8: 15-25

15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" **16** it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. **18** I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. **19** For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; **20** for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. **22** We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; **23** and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? **25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.



Dr. Lewis Thomas was a remarkable man. He lived from 1913 to 1993 and has been described as a physician, poet, etymologist, essayist, administrator, educator, policy advisor, and researcher. He spent his career fighting cancer at Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York and he spent time reflecting on various philosophical and theological questions that continued to come up in his work. He suggested that cell fusion, the merging of two or more cells which happens for us humans in the early stages of gestation, may be part of that code which allowed human beings to

evolve from the original primordial cell. If this is true, he said, such a union may account for our tendency to form attachments to each other even now.

"Cell fusion," Dr. Thomas says, "can be used as a metaphor for the way the whole place actually works; we live as the working parts of a planetary system of life in which the urge to join up together is the underlying driving force in nature."

The urge to join up together. It is at the very root of our humanness, part of our DNA, it is what makes us who we are. The urge to join up together. It is a part of the beauty that is our creation by God in whose image we are called into existence. The urge to join up together. It is the reason we sit here on a Sunday morning, the reason we want to be with each other in this space week after week.

But why here? Why in this place called Havertown? Why with these people? We can honor this innate urge to join up together by going to the Shore or the golf course, we can respond to the pull to make connections with each other by hanging out at the ball game or at the bar, we can go take a hike or stroll through the mall if all we want is to join up with others. But why church? And why Hope?

My goal for the summer is for worship to be a little different so that we can explore those kinds of questions during our time together. And to help us do that I have invited several lay people to be Voices of Hope for us, to think aloud about why they are here, to speak from their hearts about what Hope means to them. Where are we going as a congregation? What keeps each of us connected to the church in a world which on the surface professes that it has no time for what we have traditionally defined as church? How can be a better family to one another? How can we meet each other's needs and fill that urge to join up together?

My hope is that this summer we can explore together those kind of questions.

“In hope we were saved,” wrote Paul to the Jesus followers who had joined together in Rome, “Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” Paul was writing about 50 years after Jesus death and resurrection and he was writing to a group of people who weren’t all that sure about what the future had in store for them. These were Gentile Christians left behind in Rome once all Jews and Jewish Christians were expelled due to their theological bickering. So it’s a smaller church than it had once been and I’m sure they had some concerns about their future and where they were headed. No doubt they had this same primordial urge to join up together – I suspect its part of what held them together just as it is part of what holds us together.

But something else kept them there too, and Paul knew it. Hope kept them alive. A little earlier in the letter Paul reminds these early Jesus followers that any sufferings in the present lead to hope down the road. “Suffering produces endurance,” he wrote, “and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5: 3c-5) Hope does not disappoint. Hope is the result of our endurance, hope leads us to know more deeply God’s love.

Is it possibly that very same hope that keeps this Hope alive?

I’ve named this summer sermon series “Summer Fruit” because I figure what better way to experience the summer than through the abundance of fruit we find at roadside stands on the way to the Shore or on our grocers shelves in our own neighborhoods. Peaches and pears, cherries and cantaloupes, watermelons and

tomatoes, plums and nectarines, blueberries and strawberries. Sweet to the lips, pleasing to the nose, cooling to the temper.

There is summer fruit for each of us as we gather in this place for worship – the sweetness of scripture, the pleasant presence of each other’s smiles, the prayers of our hearts calming our souls. It is the summer fruit of our worship this year and I invite each of you to enjoy it. Enjoy the words of your brothers and sisters who bring with their words God’s fruit.

So why not just the pastor preaching all summer? He looking for extra time off? No, I’ll be here when each of our Voices of Hope speaks – I have my vacation Sundays as usual, but I’ll be here for the fruit as well. I need to hear – *we* need to hear – each other. It is key to our future as a congregation that we know from each other what vision we have and what direction we each have in mind. It is vital that we be open to not only what the Pastor has to say week after week after week but to be open to what each one of us has to say to each other. Please be here each week – not just the weeks that I’m preaching – but the weeks that each of these Voices of Hope speak. Be here to hear each other as together we focus even more clearly on our hope and our future.

“From the fruit of the mouth one is filled with good things,” the book of Proverbs reminds us. (Proverbs 12:14a). And this summer is the time we can set aside to enjoy that fruit, fruit that will bring with it renewal and refreshment. From the words of our mouths this summer can come that summer fruit that we all desire.

"A perfect summer day," said James Dent, "is when the sun is shining, the breeze is blowing, the birds are singing, and the lawn mower is broken." Those are the days I look forward to as summer arrives, the days of hammocks and BBQ grills, of porch swings and sprinklers. My hope for each of us this summer is that each Sunday the sun and the breeze and the birds come with us to worship – my prayer for each of us is that every Sunday our lawn

mowers are broken! Next week, no lawn mowers are allowed in the Popow's garden – an annual treat for the senses and beautiful setting for our worship.

"Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time," says John Lubbock. Rest, listen to the water, lie in the grass, watch the clouds. Pitch your tent at Merry Place with some of us next Saturday, come to the Phillies game on July 10, worship at Merry Place later in July. Whatever meets your need to be recreated over these next few weeks, do it. Relax, renew, rejoice – enjoy the summer fruit from the farmer's stands and the freshness of all that God has surrounded you with.

And don't forget your spirit this summer. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us," wrote Paul. God's love will be expressed in our words these weeks exactly because it has been poured into our hearts. So let's agree to come back here each Sunday and together let us hear the summer fruit from the words of Hope's voices.

Amen.