

A Word from our General Presbyter

Ed Thompson

Preach hope. That was the advice given by the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, J. Herbert Nelson, when asked what we should tell our people to do. At least that's how I remember it. My notes from that session of the Mid Council Leader's Gathering, held last month in St. Louis, are unclear.

Preach hope. Maybe the economy is doing well, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average near record highs, but many financial experts seem wary since this bull market has lasted longer than most. Gas prices are down, but political unrest in Saudi Arabia and damage to refineries in Texas from Hurricane Harvey suggest higher prices in the future. Even when something sounds good, there's always another negative side to the story. Some group always seems offended. Maybe it's because we live in a 24-hour news cycle that constantly bombards us with reports of crises and potential crises. It doesn't help that almost every other TV commercial promotes a drug that's supposed to help treat some disease, yet has side effects that seem worse than the original condition.

Preach hope. We can be discouraged by all this, by the political divisions within our state and nation, as well as within our families. I'm sure some people are hoping for bad weather during the holiday season, so we'll have something safe to talk about at our family gatherings.

Preach hope. For many churches, celebrating an anniversary or even cleaning the sanctuary can be depressing. We remember the crowds that used to come and the people that used to be there. We remember when our Sunday School classes were full and there were dozens of kids in the youth group. We remember when we had to bring in folding chairs to seat people at Christmas Eve and Easter because we didn't have enough room in the pews to hold everyone. Those were good problems to have, even if it didn't seem that way at the time.

Preach hope. For many, it seems like our best days were in the past, and maybe that's true. But do we believe God's best days are in the past? Or do we believe that God's best days lie ahead of us? God is still at work in our world, our communities, and our churches. We are here because the need is here. We are here because we believe there is a God who can use us as agents of transformation. We are here because we believe God has called us to witness to God's love and God's justice.

Preach hope. We can easily get caught up in a negative cycle of complaints and worrying about what we don't have. We can make a long list of what we think we need. However, there's another way to look at it. We have all we need if we trust the Lord. So, let's stop complaining about what we don't have, and let's use what we do have. God has given us what we need to do the work.

Preach hope. I might have said preach joy, preach peace, or preach love. The more I think about it, though, the more I think J. Herbert Nelson is right. The man's a great preacher. When he reads scripture, he sounds like God on a good day. I found his presentation sobering. I found it inspiring. I found it challenging. There were several outstanding workshops at this conference. To be fair, there were others that were, well, just fair. But thanks to J. Herbert Nelson, what I will remember from my time in St. Louis is what I encourage you to do and what I will aim to do myself: Preach hope.