

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Gen. 28:10-19a Ps. 139 Rom. 8:12-25 Matt. 13

A sermon given by Pastor Elaine Hewes

St. Brendan Episcopal Church July 19, 2026

I think it would be fair to say that many of us are trying to hold onto hope these days in the midst of a myriad of challenges; some of those challenges being corporate in nature, having to do with the state of our nation and our world... and some of those challenges being more personal in nature, having to do with health issues, relational issues, and questions related to aging and the loss of what we had, for much of our lives, taken for granted...

The truth is, there are many ways to speak of “hope,” as evidenced by the scores of sayings you can find on the internet having to do with this word of longing and waiting...

Most of us are probably familiar with Emily Dickinson’s little poem about hope in which she says,

*“Hope is the thing with feathers*

*That perches in the soul,*

*And sings the tune without the words*

*And never stops at all.”*

Someone named Robert Green Ingersoll once wrote, "Hope is the only bee that makes honey without flowers."

Desmund Tutu said that "Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness."

And the Muslim mystic and poet Rumi was known to have said, *"There is a secret medicine given to those who hurt so hard they cannot hope. The hoppers would be jealous if they knew."*

There are also three different American Sign Language signs for the word "hope," which is unusual... for one word to have so many signs... One is this... *fingers crossed on both hands*... a sign that would be used to say something like **"I hope we have good weather today"** ... Another is this... *V fingers on both hands brought to the eyes and then moved upward and outward*... a sign that indicates looking forward to something in the future, as in **"I'm hoping for, or looking forward to, an afternoon of sailing on Penobscot Bay."** ... (Something I have never said in my entire life)... And the third sign is this... The *index finger is brought to the head to indicate a thought, followed by both hands moving up and down in a kind of unresolved way* as if in **"a thought awaited"** ... **not yet completed... still very much yearned for even as it may be taking shape in one's mind and heart and in the unfolding of one's life...**

It is this third ASL sign that is most in keeping with the kind of hope to which we are called as Christians...

In our reading from Romans 8 this morning, Paul writes to the early Christian community in Rome about hope, offering words Christians have referred to in times of trouble since those words were first written just 20 years or so after the death and resurrection of Jesus... Paul acknowledging the groaning of creation for freedom and release from the narrow-minded, small-hearted, violent ways of the world, and calling those in the Christian community in Rome to do two things...

One, **to live in hope** for the day when all of creation would be transformed into the glorious fulness of life which God had intended for creation since the beginning...(use "V" ASL sign Hope, **as in a looking forward** to that day)...

And second, **to live in patience** for that day, having already been freed by Christ to live as God's children, embodying in word and in deed the hope that was already revealed to them but not yet brought to fulfilment or fulness... (use the third ASL sign)...

The hope not yet seen, but only sensed in the body of the crucified and risen Christ, broken, set free and shared in a thousand thousand ways... God's dream of *shalom* or oneness for all of creation still in the process of becoming as the spirit of Jesus takes root in people's hearts, grows and bears fruit thirty fold, sixty fold, a hundred fold...

That thought... that dream... that vision, offering a hope to those early Christians in Rome... a hope not seen but sensed... sensed, like those raw braille fingers of which one poet writes as he writes of hope...

Those raw braille fingers that feel for signs of healing and wholeness where there are few signs of such things to be found... but once sensed, borne witness to... in hope... *(use third ASL sign)*...

It is a certain kind of hope to which we are called as Christians... A hope very much in keeping with the third ASL sign *(show sign)* and (I want to suggest) in keeping

- with a little riff on the word “hope” inspired by Romans 8,
- by the story of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection,
- and by something that happened once at Gate A4 at the Albuquerque airport...

That little riff on the word “hope” having been written by a pastor (me) who hopes *(use the sign with the crossed fingers)* Paul would not object to it too much... This pastor writes...

*Hope is a wild child,*

*Not bound by circumstance or*

*conventional wisdom.*

*She has deep respect for the dark,*

*and finds herself there more often*

*than not.*

*Hope knows that 2+2 does not always equal 4,*

*And she loves jazz, Mahalia Jackson and Bach*

*in equal measure.*

*Hope is no stranger to hospital rooms,  
Prison cells, war zones, or graveyards,  
Although try telling that to the  
Hallmark company.*

*Hope is not afraid of the hard questions  
Like, "Why is there suffering?"  
And "Where is God?"  
And "How is it that peaches are so sweet,  
and the moon so luminous,  
and the very thing that can break  
your heart can also deepen  
your soul?"*

*Hope cannot be bought, sold to the  
highest bidder, or possessed by any one  
tribe, nation, or religion...*

*Hope has the capacity to see things from  
Inside out and upside down.*

*She can hold paradox and opposites in  
a single embrace.*

*She knows what it feels like to collapse*

*on the floor with pain and grief...*

*Which is why her favorite word in all  
the world*

*is the word "possible"...*

*Not "probable" or "certain,"*

*But "possible,"*

*Because it's raw and truthful*

*and excruciatingly open*

*and willing to stand up to*

*"impossible" again and again*

*And again*

*Without crumbling in defeat*

*Or succumbing to*

*sweetness,*

*easy answers,*

*or worn-out platitudes...*

*"It's like this," hope often says when people*

*Ask her to explain herself...*

*"I am the **trust** (even in the midst of the*

*horrors, the violence and the suffering  
of this world)...*

*"I am the **trust** (even in the devastations of  
Illness, anxiety, shame  
and hopelessness)...*

*"I am the **trust**, the deep down,  
Gut-wrenching, feral,  
Ridiculous, ludicrous **trust**  
that despite everything,  
something else  
is possible...."*

**Hope as trust that despite everything something else is possible...**

Which leads me to the airport story... a story to which I turn again and again when I'm trying to discern the Christian understanding of "hope"...

A story told by Palestinian American poet Naomi Shihab Nye about the day at Gate A-4 in the Albuquerque airport when she helped a non-English speaking, extremely upset, wailing elderly Palestinian woman realize that she hadn't missed her flight to El Paso and an important medical appointment after all...that her flight hadn't been cancelled, just delayed... that she would get there just fine...

Naomi Shihab Nye writing about how she, speaking Palestinian, calmed the anxious woman down (who, by the way, reminded Naomi Shihab Nye of her grandmother)... and about how, while they were waiting for two hours for the plane to depart, Naomi used her phone to call the woman's sons, Naomi's father and an assortment of Palestinian poets Naomi knew so her "new best friend" could talk to them...

The joy of all that inspiring the Palestinian grandmother to take a sack of mamool cookies out of her traveling bag (mamool cookies being little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nut), and to offer them to everyone at the gate... which everyone accepted, much to Naomi's surprise... leaving everyone at Gate A4 covered in powdered sugar...

The joy of all that inspiring the airline to take out free apple juice for all the travelers, which two little girls served with their powdered sugar hands...

Naomi Shihab Nye ending her account of what happened at Gate 4A at the Albuquerque Airport this this way... *"I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and thought, this is the world I want to live in. The shared world. Not a single person in that gate – once the crying and confusion stopped – seemed apprehensive about any other person... They took the cookies. I wanted to hug them all..."*

*This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost."*

Meaning it's possible... Naomi's story giving me **hope** that it's possible... And by that I mean **hope as the trust that in any given airport (or anywhere for that matter... any hospital room or graveyard**



**or war zone), in the midst of all that seems so impossible, something else is possible...** And opening my eyes to see it, to look for it in one form or another... (Just as the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection gives us eyes to see the same, even in the most seemingly God-forsaken and derelict of times and places...+)...

Hope as  
*the deep down,*  
*Gut-wrenching, feral,*  
*Ridiculous, ludicrous **trust***  
*that despite everything,*  
*something else*  
*is possible...*

Something we might call love, care, compassion, music, light, connection... life... justice... good trouble... courage... healing... imagination... transformation... resurrection...

(And let me just say that I had thought of sharing a different story with you this morning to speak of the Christian understanding of hope... A story told in a 16-minute Netflix film called "The Singers" that takes place in a dark and derelict bar on a bitter cold snowy night out in the middle of nowhere... I wanted to share it with you because it is the truest revelation I have seen in a long time of the kind of hope to which Christians are called... **The kind of hope that trusts that somewhere in**

**all the pain and loss and suffering and despair it's possible that something else will rise...** But I decided not to share it with you because I didn't want to give too much of the story away...

It's a Netflix film called "The Singers"... And before you go home and watch it, let me give you fair warning... Do not watch it with children around... Do not watch it if you have an aversion to swearing and base language... Do not tell the Bishop I suggested you watch it...

The thing is, I know there may be some among us this morning, who, for any number of reasons may be hurting so hard they can not hope... Can not trust that in all the impossibilities of the moment **it's possible** that love or life or music or healing or justice might rise, take root, and grow even two-fold, much less thirty, sixty or one hundred...

There may be some among us (and there are days when I am one) whose raw braille fingers are weary from feeling the contours of these times for a sign of something other than hatred and division and loss and fear... and whose hands have stopped doing even this... *show third ASL sign for hope...*

If that is true for you, let me remind you, just as the Muslim poet Rumi says in his little word of wisdom about hope... let me remind you that there is a secret medicine given to those who hurt so hard they cannot hope...

As Christians we know that secret medicine to be the love that waits everywhere, even in the most God-forsaken places + to reveal itself... to take on flesh and bone and voice so it can be sensed, taken in, known and shared... Just as it was that day at Gate A4 in the

Albuquerque airport... Just as it is a thousand thousand times a day when care and compassion are extended, and good trouble is practiced and derelict worn-out men sitting in a bar on a cold bitter night out in the middle of nowhere do something you would never in a million years imagine...

Love, taking on flesh, just as it will be in a few moments as we open our raw braille fingers and receive into our weary hands the very body of the incarnate God made known in Jesus, along with the words, "This is my body, broken for you... broken for you... for you, so will know that Emmanuel God with us is with you through it all..."

God hoping (*use third ASL sign for hope*)... (Imagine God hoping)... Hoping that in time you will begin (I will begin, we will begin) not only to **see** the possibility of love rising, but also **be** the possibility of love rising so that others will know the power of hope in their lives...

Hope as  
*the deep down,*  
*Gut-wrenching, feral,*  
*Ridiculous, ludicrous **trust***  
*that despite everything,*  
*something else*  
*is possible....*

Not everything is lost, dear friends... We live by a story that tells us this is so... A story about a God who even now is covered in powdered

sugar and eating mamool cookies with the rest of the late and weary travelers at gate A4... What more could we hope for (*show 3<sup>rd</sup> ASL sign for hope*) than such a God? Who could ever have imagined such a thing?