

Hope and (Inter)Faith

A Summary Reflection on Bigger Bible School 2018

~Fr. David~

What a fantastic four nights we were treated to by our collection of presenters during Bigger Bible School! Lama Matthew Rice, Rev. Letiah Frasier, Imam Sulaiman Salaam, and Rabbi Debbie Stiel were engaging and enlightening while challenging us to think in fresh ways about the nature of hope. Our Kitchen Angels once again treated us like Kings and Queens, providing us wonderful food and working hard behind the scenes to take care of us even as we were listening to the various presenters. We averaged about 120 each night. I certainly enjoyed myself.

Our three presenters from the western, monotheistic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) all agreed that hope is in some sense an action word rather than a feeling word. In describing the difference between belief and hope, Imam Salaam said that it is one thing to believe that one can be President of the United States; but when one has hope, you start a *campaign*.

What an appropriate analogy in light of Rev. Frasier's presentation the night before. Recall that Rev. Frasier was at St. Michael's representing The Poor People's *Campaign*, a movement begun by Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968 to advocate for those in poverty regardless of race and to confront the systemic roots of that poverty. Rev. Frasier asked us to experience hope in the movements of our bodies—getting up, expressing ourselves, taking a position by physically relocating our bodies, engaging with those around us. She brought just a brief glimpse—a toe in the water—of what a campaign *feels* like. Hope, we learned, is movement.

Rabbi Stiel quoted Rabbi Michael Marmur, who said, "Optimism is the belief that things will get better. Hope is the faith that *with our efforts*, we can help make things better. Optimism is passive; hope is active." Hope is not the foundation of an attitude or a worldview. Hope is the foundation of action on behalf of what is hoped for. Hope doesn't just make us feel good, it empowers us to change the world.

Lama Rice began our series with a cautionary word that reveals the Buddhist tradition at its finest. Hope, he suggested, is not necessarily a good thing. We should, at least, be discerning about how we relate to hope. Hope must not become something to which we are *attached*, for attachment—even attachment to hope—leads to suffering. This way of thinking about hope may at first sound odd to Christian ears, but recall these words of Abraham Lincoln: "My concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side." Our hope must always be laced with humility lest we inadvertently replace God's purposes with our own. We must be careful, then, not to become attached to our hope, but to surrender to our hope *in God*, whose full purposes we can never hope to comprehend. As Lincoln said, "The Almighty has his own purposes."

We must remember that we serve God; that such humble service is the beginning and the end of our hope. Even as we take action, we remember that our hope is not in ourselves, but in the one we serve. We must always check our hopes and our actions as we discern the movement of God's spirit in the world.

This raises the question: If we do not take action in some way—with our bodies, our voices, our votes, our finances—do we ever experience real hope? Or are we merely relaxing into a fuzzy, optimistic feeling like a familiar, comfy chair? If our hope is a feel-good emotion, then when someone takes it from us we feel sad or frustrated. If our hope is deeper, with greater purpose, then when someone tries to take it from us, we feel *called to take action*. Hope is a powerful and empowering.

I leave you with a summary of Christian hope from yet another thread in the tapestry of faith, the Taizé community.

Hoping, then, means first of all discovering in the depths of the present a Life that leads forward and that nothing is able to stop. It also means welcoming this Life by a yes spoken by our whole being. As we embark on this Life, we are led to create signs of a different future here and now, in the midst of the difficulties of the world, seeds of renewal that will bear fruit when the time comes.

~from "Christian Hope: A Taizé Reflection"

https://www.taize.fr/en_article343.html

To all of you who attended Faith & Hope: Bigger Bible School 2018, I thank you; and I hope that you were stimulated, challenged, and inspired as I was. If you were not able to join us this year, please know that we missed you and look forward to the next opportunity to grow in faith together.

Peace (Shalom, Salam)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. David". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "D" and a cursive "David".

Fr. David