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FINDING HOPE IN A TROUBLED TIME

LAMENTATIONS 1:1–6; 3:19–26

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## The Source of Our Hope

*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,  
his mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning.*

Lamentations 3:22–23a

It may seem strange to begin a week's worth of meditations on the theme of hope with material from the book of Lamentations. After all, a lament is a cry of grief.

Lamentations begins at this very spot. It opens with a bleak description of Jerusalem after its ruin. The events of the day have rendered Jerusalem's glory into a thing of the past. The first verse of Lamentations is filled with verbs in the past tense. It is all was, was, was. Delight is no more.

It is easy enough for us to compose such a sentence over at least a portion of our lives today. Even if something is not in ruins already, delight can seem sorely threatened.

But Lamentations also indicates where hope is found. Hope is found in the capabilities of God, who is great, good, and able. God has the capacity and the will to bring newness. This opens us to anticipate joy, and anticipated joy is hope.



*Lord of my soul, you are the God whose steadfast love  
and creativity never cease. Your mercy is endless. Help  
me to grow in this hope and to end my despairing.  
Amen.*

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2022

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EZEKIEL 47:1–12

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## Waters Deep Enough to Swim In

*Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed.*

Ezekiel 47:5

The book of Ezekiel comes to us from a desperate time in the life of the people of Israel. The prophet's home country was in ruins; its temple was in tatters.

Ezekiel 47 presents an image of the renewing work of God, transforming dismal days into ones of lasting hope. The image is of a river flowing from beneath the altar of a new temple and streaming all the way to the Dead Sea. The river grows in depth as it flows. Ultimately this river refreshes the Dead Sea and all the land around it.

This river flows in our time of national division and despair. It flows from God—not from programs, politicians, or pundits. We draw near this river of hope when we attend to public worship, the reading of Scripture, and our prayers. Hope that is all but dried up can become waters deep enough to swim in!



*O God of hope, fill us with the joy and peace of believing which is found when we hope in you and then lead us in your right way. Amen.*

Mark E. Yurs, Belleville, Wisconsin

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EXODUS 3:1–22

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## Words That Tell of the Living God

*Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, “The LORD, the God of your ancestors, . . . has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and . . . I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt.”*

Exodus 3:16, 17a

The Hebrews were a beleaguered people prior to the exodus event. All they had known was upended. Injustice surrounded them. They tried to advance human rights (Exod. 1:15–22). But no effort of theirs righted what was wrong. Then Moses appeared, fresh from his encounter with God at the burning bush. His message was that though the old generation was gone, the God of old was still alive with the same love and strength of old, and God would deliver.

To describe the times in which the Hebrews of the exodus lived is to describe our own time. Thank God the message they heard is one for us as well. Never forget that the God of Exodus is still alive and afoot in this battered age. Faith in the active presence of God can give rise to a fresh hope that dissipates old despair and can make buoyant again the strength that has wearied into fatigue.

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*Mighty God, we thank you for the untiring way in which you are alive today. Let us find our hope in you and find strength in that hope. Amen.*

Mark E. Yurs, Belleville, Wisconsin

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2022

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2 KINGS 6:24–25; 7:3–20

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## Food for Hungry Souls

*So they arose at twilight to go to the Aramean camp; but when they came to the edge of the Aramean camp, there was no one there at all.*

2 Kings 7:5

The city of Samaria was under siege by Aram's army. Four lepers, outcast because of their disease, lived outside Samaria's city wall. They were hungry and fearful of Aram's army. They decided that they had nothing to lose. They would starve if they went into the city and if they stayed where they were. They might be killed if they begged the Arameans for food. They opted to go to the enemy camp on the chance that they would be met with kindness.

Arriving, they were amazed to discover the Aramean camp was empty! The enemy had departed in such a hurry that they left their provisions behind. There was food! There was drink! What is more, there was news—the good news that the enemy was no longer a threat.

This is news for us too. We may have bombardments to our peace of mind, but there is reason to hope, for God supplies spiritual food to sustain us in our struggle.



*Holy Provider, we thank you for every morsel of daily bread that comes our way to feed us with hope and to strengthen us in service. Help us to trust in you more than we fear that which threatens. Amen.*

Mark E. Yurs, Belleville, Wisconsin

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ISAIAH 41:1–10

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## The Deep Is Not Too Deep for Hope

*Do not fear, for I am with you,  
do not be afraid, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you, I will help you;  
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.*

Isaiah 41:10

When our children were little, my job was to stand in the deep end of the pool where I could be a buoy on which they could rest and catch their breath before resuming their play.

There is a scene in *The Pilgrim's Progress* where Christian and his companion, Hopeful, come to a great river with no bridge to cross. The deep waters are soon over Christian's head. Just as he is despairing, Hopeful calls out from the water, "Be of good cheer, my brother: I feel the bottom, and it is good."\* Isaiah calls to us in the same way: "Do not fear, . . . I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."

Like children in a pool, we paddle as best as we can through much that is deep and difficult, and we soon tire. But let all the fatigued know they are buoyed in God and offered hope that feels the bottom and finds it sound.



*Life-saving God, I fear being overwhelmed by the troubles that wash over me. Grant that I might feel the strength of your upholding hand. Amen.*

Mark E. Yurs, Belleville, Wisconsin

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\* John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress: A Readable Modern-Day Version of John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, rev. by Alan Vermilye (Brown Chair Press, 2020), 219.

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EXODUS 14:1–31

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## Acting on a Promise Not Yet Proved

*The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground,  
the waters forming a wall for them on their right  
and on their left.*

Exodus 14:22

The parting of the Red Sea is one of the great miracles in the Bible. God performed a mighty deed rescuing the Israelites who were trapped. The sea—uncrossable—was before them; Pharaoh's army came behind them in hot pursuit. There was no escape.

God made a way where there was no way. By a strong east wind that blew as if from heaven, the sea divided and a kind of hallway appeared. There was a wall of water to the right, a wall of water to the left, and a corridor of dry land in between. The escapees were told to walk that path through the sea to the other side. Can you imagine it? How frightening that must have been. Was it safe to walk down the bank and into the pathway where the sea used to be? Would the surprising corridor last? Could it be trusted?

God did God's part. The people had to do theirs. It took courage to act on the promise. Hope is real, but it calls for daring action and not simple passivity.



*O God, help me to trust that you will act in a loving way on my behalf. Help me to act, too, making me a brave participant in my own life. Amen.*

Mark E. Yurs, Belleville, Wisconsin

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HABAKKUK 3:17–18

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## Hope Abides in the Barren Times

*Though the fig tree does not blossom,*

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*yet I will rejoice in the LORD;*

*I will exult in the God of my salvation.*

Habakkuk 3:17, 18

There are people who are prone to think we need to have some inkling to rely on, some vivid sign that there is hope, before we can be even moderately hopeful.

Habakkuk was not such a person. His little book closes with one of the finest poems in literature. Its opening lines in verse 17 tally up his resources, and the total comes to nil. These poignant words paint a vivid image of the economic despair of a farmer. Yet the poem ends with a remarkable declaration of hope. There is no blossom, no fruit, no produce, no yield, no cattle, “yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will exult in the God of my salvation” (v. 18).

Hope, here, is less a feeling based on present experience than a decision to trust God in spite of circumstances. Hope can abide in emptiness by rejoicing in God who is abundant.



*O God of hope, keep me from waiting to become  
hopeful and help me to be hopeful because you are the  
God of hope. Amen.*

Mark E. Yurs, Belleville, Wisconsin

