(Wynne’s video celebrating Easter salvations)

Bumper: “What Hope Is” video

Multi Campus Celebration: There was a lot of hope that went into our Easter planning this year. To tag on to what Pastor Wynne shared, we had a wonderful Easter celebration at the Chester Campus and Amelia Campuses with first time guests in the services.

At Chester we had an atmosphere of excited expectation of what God was going to do. We held 2 services for the first time ever, after a year of COVID with just a worship leader we were blessed to have our own live band again – it was a fantastic celebration of the goodness of God.

If you have ever served in any way at our Chester Campus, maybe you helped with the remodel when we launched or the roof project last October, or if you have come to Chester or Amelia to support our team, or joined in praying for our campuses, then you are a part of that victory story too!

When we have victory across our campuses, we can all celebrate together! It is good to be a part of a big church, with a wide reach!

Introduction: These stories give us hope!

(The greatest need in our world is HOPE.)

The greatest need in our world is HOPE.

Hope is why Pastors Brian and Mike Hancock still cheer for the Cowboys even though they haven’t won a Superbowl in 25 years – but hey, it’s a new year.

Hope motivates perfectly sane, otherwise responsible men to spend thousands of dollars buying bass boats, rods, reels, and baits expecting to catch the fish of a lifetime – next time.

Hope inspires a perfectly sane, otherwise responsible woman to spend hundreds of dollars buying clothes she can’t fit into – yet.

Hope is why that uncoordinated, lanky teenager tries out for the basketball team for the first time – and the fourth time.

Hope is why researchers study diseases like the Corona Virus desiring to create remedies and vaccines.

Hope is why people flood our southern border seeking a better life in our country, despite the high cost and present danger.

Hope is powerful – especially when placed in the right thing.

Hope is believing in the possibility of a desirable future.

In many of the examples above, that hope was potentially misplaced, or at least placed in something that doesn’t deliver with any consistency.

(Hope through the resurrection/Optimism of Grace)

Over the last 16 months, the fear of a virus that has infected over 30 million Americans and claimed the lives of an estimated half million citizens has left us clamoring for hope.

For far too many, hope has been elusive.

Unemployment hit a high of 15% last April with more than a third of those families still looking for hope through meaningful employment.

Of the 30 million small businesses in America, 100,000 have permanently closed and 9 million are worried they won’t survive the pandemic.

Food insecurity in the US rose from 35 to 45 million people, including 15 million kids.

Unemployment, business closures, and food insecurity all point to the fact that families are in trouble, and they need hope.

SLIDE 2 Southside Church has a mission to make Christlike disciples who impact families to transform our world.

Right now, those families we are called to impact need real hope!

Unfortunately, it often gets substituted simple optimism.

Optimism says, “I know it looks bad, but it will turn out ok.”

But optimism does nothing to affect your circumstances; it just gives you a rosier outlook.

However, Christian Hope is unique.

Hope is believing in the possibility of a desirable future.

SLIDE 3 Christian hope is believing in the character and promises of God for a desirable future .

This isn’t just optimism; it is the optimism of Grace.

We believe that a loving, faithful God, who graciously cares for us, will continue to do whatever is necessary to reveal his love and bring his will to completion.

Christian hope is validated by the resurrection of Jesus!

Because Jesus is ALIVE, we can have HOPE.

This hope is so much more than just a wish or a dream.

It is the sure hope that the same God who raised Jesus from the dead, the God who has moved heaven and earth to offer us salvation, will surely carry on to completion everything he promised he would do!

SLIDE 4 Christian hope is hope with a purpose – it desires to see God’s will lived out. This hope gives meaning and purpose to our lives as we walk into God’s desirable future together!

SLIDE 5 Christian hope is hope with substance – it is not based on a rosier disposition but on a God who has proven he will finish what he started, no matter the cost!

SLIDE 6 Christian hope is a hope that does not disappoint – it is as trustworthy as the God we put our hope in, and the Bible promises,

“This hope will not lead to disappointment.” (Romans 5:5 NLT)

We are invited to put our hope in something far greater, far more reliable, and far more enjoyable than the temporary desires of this life.

(A hope that supersedes every circumstance!)

Because Jesus is ALIVE we know that our hope is a hope that can supersede every circumstance.

SLIDE 7 If the nails on the cross, the stone at the tomb, and even death itself could not stop Jesus from being victorious, then no circumstance in life can defeat our hope if it is placed in him!

The Apostle Peter tells us in…

1 Peter 1:3 (NIV) 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

A living hope.

There are a lot of things in life that offer a passive hope – a wish from a distance that will likely never come true.

Peter invites us to celebrate a God who gives us a living hope. As if this hope is actively seeking fulfilment - pursuing us and inviting us to be a part of its own inevitable success.

If you know anything about Peter, then you know this is the kind of hope he desperately needed.

As we read the story of Peter in the Gospels, we see a daring, outspoken follower of Jesus.

So daring, he looks Jesus in the face and promises he will never fail him – even if every other disciple gets it wrong.

Yet, when the time actually came for the soldiers to arrest Jesus, Peter made the same flawed, fear-based decisions that everyone else made.

He ran away. He fled into the darkness.

When things go terribly wrong in your life, what is your initial gut reaction? Your first response?

Is it to hide? To run away? To pretend it didn’t happen?

Peter wanted to hide his fear and failure. Yet, Jesus has a way of drawing us to himself. So Peter went to the place where Jesus was being held and stood at a distance, watching and warming himself by a fire.

A servant girl recognized him. “You are one of them,” she said. Peter instantly lost it.

He started yelling and cursing – swearing that he didn’t even know Jesus!

Then Jesus looked at him.

For three years Peter had seen those eyes. Eyes that granted mercy, issued purpose, and displayed compassion. Eyes that cut through Peter’s soul –past his fear, his excuses, and his inadequate faith.

It was more than Peter could bear.

And for the second time that night, Peter fled into the darkness.

He couldn’t imagine a world where the hope of Jesus no longer existed.

Last week we celebrated the Easter story. It was early on that Sunday morning that Peter ran to the tomb and saw Jesus’ body was missing.

But Peter wondered, If Jesus is alive, is there still a place in his Kingdom for me?

We eventually find out in John 21 that Peter has gone back to fishing. Everything that Peter hoped for had been destroyed, so he went back to something he was good at.

We read in John 21:4-7 (NIV) that -

4Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. 5He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered. 6He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”

SLIDE 8 (Image) When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

7Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

So much of this story sounds familiar.

When the man on the shore said cast your nets on the other side, it triggered a memory for Peter. He had seen this before. Could it be Jesus?

Then, when he caught a miraculously large school of fish which should have overwhelmed his boat and torn his nets, it triggered another memory. Jesus had done this before. Could it be Jesus?

Before his heart knew what was happening something shifted in Peter.

He stopped being afraid.

He started to hope again.

Peter dove in the water and swam to shore. He had to get to Jesus!

On the shore, he found some bread and fish cooking on a fire. What a welcomed sight to a wet and tired fisherman.

But I have to wonder if Peter’s mind was drawn to another fire he stood near – the one that he stared into as he rebuked the servant girl and denied that he even knew Jesus.

I wonder if his heart grew heavy.

As Jesus grabbed the bread and shared it among the disciples, I wonder if Peter thought about the upper room and their last supper before Jesus was arrested – before Peter’s failure.

I wonder if his heart grew heavier still.

Could there be any hope for Peter?

(Through failure forgiven we are set free into a new hope!)

Three times Peter had denied that he knew Jesus just before the crucifixion.

Now, sitting on the shore with the disciples, Jesus asks Peter a question that surely cut to Peter’s heart.

We read in John 21:15-

15When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

16Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” 17The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

Three times Peter had denied Jesus, and three times now, Jesus has offered Peter a chance to make the wrong things right.

Jesus asked a serious question that cut right to the heart of Peter’s failure.

But Jesus’ intention was to show Peter that forgiveness was possible.

SLIDE 9 Through forgiveness everything radically changed for Peter. He no longer had a simple hope where he wished he could do more, be more for God. Peter now had a living hope, based solely on the resurrected Jesus.

Because of his HOPE, this optimism of grace which brought him to Jesus, Peter….

* Went from feeling useless to having a new purpose in God’s redemption story.
* Had a clear path to serve God through serving others.
* Would have the strength to face a future where he would willingly go to his execution because of his hope in the resurrection.

Jesus is ALIVE! And Jesus had made him ALIVE through a living hope which reaches far beyond death.

Do you believe God will do whatever it takes to forgive your failures and draw your focus toward a relationship with him?

I believe God will move heaven and earth to reveal His will to those who truly seek Him, so that we can live out this hope.

I believe it because I’ve lived it.

(Personal Testimony)

In 2005, God asked me a serious question too.

I was halfway through my senior year at Mount Vernon Nazarene University. I was taking a full load of classes and was busier than I knew how to handle.

I was the Vice President of a ministry organization called Living Witness, and it allowed me the opportunity to travel to churches all over the region preaching and leading the worship services with a team of college students.

I was also the Tech Director for a theater production at MVNU.

I was also working 30 hours a week as a manager at a retail job.

I was also interning at church and leading the youth group there.

I was also in way over my head and unsure of how I was going to survive that semester.

One early January morning I was invited to sit down with the Academic Dean and figure out just what my options were after my less than stellar fall semester.

Sitting in his office it quickly became clear that I had no options.

I was being academically dismissed.

I had a Peter moment. Sitting there in that office I realized – it was over.

God had called me to ministry. I was supposed to spend the rest of my life preaching the Gospel and inviting people to find HOPE in Jesus.

God had miraculously provided for me so that I could attend college and prepare for that calling.

My parents had sacrificed year after year to help keep me in college.

My friends who were counting on me had to scramble and figure out how to keep Living Witness alive and ministering.

My church had to find someone else to lead the youth ministry and I had to look all those teenagers in the eye, those students that I loved and cared so deeply for and tell them goodbye.

Even my friends at work, friends that I had spent the last 2 years witnessing to, were left scrambling to find a new manager and I felt like all my efforts to impact their lives had been wasted.

It was over.

I moved back in with my parents and tried to find a place to land at my home church, a church where for two summers I had interned, once as the children’s ministry leader, once as the youth pastor.

Everyone meant well, but there was a lot of guilt that surrounded going to church. I got a lot of disappointing looks and whispers as I walked past people in the hall.

They all knew my failure.

Life the way I planned it was over, but life wasn’t over, so I tried to help everywhere I could.

Our church planned a mission trip that summer to assist with an inner-city church and rescue mission near Indianapolis.

SLIDE 10 We planned the trip in connection to the 2005 General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene.

If you aren’t familiar with that, it is a gathering every 4 years of church members, leaders, and pastors from all around the world.

We discuss our global mission initiatives, church policy and operating procedures, and more importantly, gather to worship with 10,000 other believers from Nazarene Churches all around the world.

That summer I signed up to serve on the trip and looked forward to being a part of General Assembly.

During the day we cleaned bathrooms, scraped and painted walls, sealed parking lots, and built handicap ramps.

In the evening we gathered together for worship in the Lucas Dome in Indianapolis.

One night Dr. Jim Bond, now retired General Superintendent, spoke and shared his story of settling the questions of who would have the throne of his heart.

Would he surrender his passions and pursuits to God and allow God to be his greatest desire?

Every word he spoke touched the point of my failure.

At the end of the service, we were invited to receive Communion and worship together.

I stood there crying out to God.

I prayed, “God, if you can do anything surely this is the moment. Gathered with 10,000 other believers worshipping your name and receiving communion together.

This is the highest and holiest moment I may ever experience. If you can do anything please help me.”

You see my failure wasn’t just in college. It was Spiritual failure. I felt like I had let God down and got my priorities all out of whack and I didn’t know how to fix the mess I had made.

Then God asked me a question – no one else heard it but I heard God’s voice loud and clear over 10,000 other voices in that room.

He simply said, “Are you serious?”

I stood there crying, a little hurt by the question. “Yes, God, I’m serious! I’m standing here crying and praying in front of 10,000 other people who are all celebrating. Yes, I’m serious.”

Then God began to take a walk through my heart and mind. He started pointing out wrong attitudes, bad habits, and temptations to sin that I hadn’t dealt with.

One by one God asked me the question again, “What about this thing in your life, are you serious about this too?”

The longer God searched the more my heart and my spirit broke.

Finally, once God had proven his point, I said, “God, I don’t know why you would want the worst things in my life, I wanted to give you the best, but if you’ll take them you can have them.”

At that moment of surrender, I felt a freedom in God’s Spirit like I’ve never felt before.

Many of you know I can’t sing a lick but my heart wanted to stand on my chair and shout and sing God’s praises!

Hope had been restored! Absolute peace from God’s Spirit flooded my heart. Anger and bitterness that had infested my soul disappeared in an instant.

I went on that trip feeling like a failure – it was over.

But in that moment I was free! I had the hope of a future with God – a place in God’s redemption story!

God not only restored my hope, he restored so much of what I had lost.

God graciously allowed me to return to MVNU – and not just return but make an impact.

God allowed me to get back on track in ministry and renewed my calling to serve him as a pastor.

Living Hope in a faithful, loving God, who proved his love through the resurrection, can set your heart free today too!

Closing:

The greatest need in our world is HOPE.

We yearn for real hope and it can only be found in one source!

SLIDE 11 Because Jesus is ALIVE we are born into a new hope greater than every circumstance we face!

This is the optimism of Grace given through the resurrection of Jesus!

Take away: Jesus desires to forgive your failures and set you free into a new hope…. what failure in your life needs to be forgiven?

Where do you need to come ALIVE through hope in Jesus?

Surrender your heart to the resurrected One today.

Accept his invitation to come ALIVE, and be born into a new HOPE!

Prayer:

Response:

SLIDE 12 Peter had to accept God’s forgiveness for his failures.

Will you accept God’s forgiveness today and start living in HOPE?

Peter also put hope into action by serving as Jesus directed him.

Easter was the dawn of a new day at Southside. More people are returning and ministries are opening up.

SLIDE 13 Will you put hope into action by signing up to serve?