

“Hoping against hope”

June 7, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Romans 4:13,16,18-24

This morning’s Scripture lesson is an amazing passage from the amazing book of Romans. We talked about it during Lent when we read the book of Romans together. This passage is the theological understanding of how Jesus followers get to become part of God’s people without having to become Jewish and obey all Jewish Law. What Paul, the author, does is looks into Jewish history to the very first Jews, the first ones chosen to be God’s people, and that was Abraham and Sarah. And Paul highlights that they become righteous in God’s eyes before there was circumcision, before there was adherence to the law, before there was inherited righteousness. It happened when Abraham believed God, and God counted it to him as righteousness. Abraham wasn’t righteous, but God decided his trust in God, his belief that God could and would do what God promised, made up for his shortcomings. We get that. I am not perfect. I have a tendency to try and be funny at inappropriate times. I forget things and fail to do things I told Amy I would do. I often take what she does for granted but expect her to acknowledge and praise me for everything I do. I have many other faults that we don’t need to get into right now, but Amy believes in me. She believes in us. And because she believes, she deals with those faults and shortcomings, and accepts me and thinks I’m awesome anyway. That is what God did for Abraham and that is what God does for us. When we believe God: when we believe God is the creator and sustainer of all that is, when we believe that Jesus is God’s Son, when we believe that Jesus died for our sins, when we believe He rose from the dead, when we believe that we too can rise from the dead because of Jesus; God counts it as righteousness. God chooses to deal with our faults and our shortcomings because we make up for them by believing God can and will do what God has promised. That is what this passage from Romans is all about.

But what I want to do this morning is focus in on a few words from verse 18 that jumped out at me this week words which might help us recognize what God is asking when God asks us to believe. Verse 18 starts with Abraham “hoping against hope.” For Abraham, that hope was for a child with Sarah. But having a child with Sarah was not going to be possible. Not only had they been trying for decades with no positive results – at least not in the pregnancy realm – they were old. Sarah had gone through menopause and was no longer cycling. From a physiological perspective, there was no possible way Sarah could become pregnant. She was not producing any eggs and not creating an environment within her womb capable of nurturing a fertilized egg if she had one. There was no reason to maintain any hope of having a child. It was impossible. Logic, experience, evidence, circumstances, biology, physiology, and simple reason said there was no way. It was no hope. But God said, “I will do this” and “hoping against hope,”

hoping in God over and against any earthly hope, Abraham believed God. And God counted it as righteousness.

That was Abraham's hope against hope. What about us? If we are to be found righteous in God's eyes the same way Abraham was, through belief, what does "hoping against hope" look like for us? What do we believe God can and will do that goes against everything we know as true? Trusting God over against trusting everything else we know.

Well it starts with resurrection. Logic, experience, evidence, circumstances, biology, physiology, and simple reason say there was no way. Once someone has died and been dead for several minutes, they stay dead. In the last 30 years there have been a couple of exceptions with individuals receiving constant CPR plus other extreme measures that allowed them to come back after several hours, but not after a day. Jesus received none of those lifesaving measures and was dead for over a day. Yet God brought Him back to life. Not just resuscitation like Lazarus, but resurrection into a new form of life, with a physical form on earth for a short while then ascending to heaven forever. And He not only invites us, but makes a way for us to follow Him there – into resurrection and life in heaven with God. That is a lot to swallow, but I believe it is something the creator and sustainer of the universe who still cares about me can do and will do. That is where we start "hoping against hope." That is where we start believing and trusting God over and against experience, evidence, logic and physiology. When we claim that, believe God can and did raise Jesus from the dead, and can and will bring resurrection to us, when we claim that, God counts it to us as righteousness.

But it is more than that. "She hit me first. I'm just evening the score." "He called me a name and told a lie about me. I'm just getting him back." Whether you are on the playground, in the board room, around the water cooler, playing a sport, or in a government office; this kind of logic makes sense. If you are attacked and don't respond in kind, you are going to be run over and become their doormat. But what does Jesus say? In Matthew 5 Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you... if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also, and if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, give your coat as well, and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile." In Luke 6 Jesus says, "Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you." Later in Romans, Paul says, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Turning the other cheek makes no sense. Loving your enemies is completely illogical, and has no hope of turning out anyway but bad. But can we believe Jesus over experience, logic, and reason? Can we believe Jesus can and will make it work? Is that where we are called to "hoping against hope"? Is that what it takes for God to see us as righteous?

They had been dating for a while and were thinking they might want to get married, so they moved-in together and are having marital relations. You know, testing everything out first, to see if they are compatible, before committing ourselves to each other. After all, you test drive a car before you buy it. “She got married too young and never really developed a sense of who she really is, and besides, the spark is gone. It is time for her to leave this relationship and experience all the things she missed – find out who she really is. They say the church’s teachings are so archaic when it comes to relationships. They are too small, too binding, too old. Times have changed. Being with and staying with one person your whole life doesn’t make sense anymore. Those ways are old, illogical, impossible. But can we believe Jesus over our thinking, our reasoning, our thoughts? Is that where we are called to “hoping against hope”? Is that what it takes for God to see us as righteous?

Sin is slowly being erased from our religious vocabulary, and it makes sense. God’s grace overcomes it. We all have times we fall short of God’s call in our lives, but Jesus died for those times, so they don’t define us. God’s grace defines us, not our sin. Therefore, standing up in front of the church, pretending to know what is sinful and what is not in everyone’s particular situation, is not necessary, because God can take care of it. It just makes sense. This new logic makes sense in our regular world too. We find ourselves saying, “My daughter doesn’t go to church anymore. She has done some research and has combined different aspects from different religions into a belief system that works for her.” And she has found contentment. “I had an affair, but that person drove me back to my wife. She never found out and we are now closer than ever. It turned out to be a good thing.” “I received a financial windfall, and the new car and extra vacation did my soul a world of good. It was a gift to me, why would it affect my tithe or my neighbor?” We experience the grace of God and things turned out okay so our sins, our evils, our wrongs must be okay. It only makes sense. But can we believe God’s “no”? Can we separate the person from their actions like God does, and say they are still good people and still loved by God, but that activity, that choice, that selfishness is immoral and wrong and has to change? Can we believe and trust in God’s way over what we rationalize. Instead of justifying and baptizing it, can we acknowledge wrong, evil and sin in our midst and in our lives; condemn it, and believe God’s grace and trust God’s forgiveness can overcome it? Is that where we are called to “hoping against hope”? Is that what it takes for God to see us as righteous?

Starting in verse 20, “No distrust made Abraham waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. Therefore ‘it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’ Now the words, ‘it was reckoned to him,’ were written not for his sake alone but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.” “It will be reckoned to us who believe:” who believe Jesus rose from the dead and we can too, who believe and follow God’s way in how we relate to each other, who believe God’s way in understanding what is

moral and what is immoral, who believe God's way needs to be followed in the journey, not just the ending. "Lord I believe. Help my unbelief."

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