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In This Way...Hope

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The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul.

Psalms 23:1-3

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, He cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" John 7:37-38

Over these past several years my wife and I have become more nostalgic than usual. I think preparing for both of our kids going off to college has made us scramble a bit for those good ole days. While we adjust to an empty house... a bit more nostalgic... looking for those good ole days... the stories that bring smiles to our faces... those experiences that lead us beside still waters... living waters that gives us hope... because there are a lot of dry places in our lives... and those dry places can create lots and lots of cracks in our hope reserve... But the power of story – to be reminded that we are not just a bunch of dried up... cracked people... is what this season of lent is all about... in this season of waiting... in this season of anticipation... in this season of preparing for the ultimate Easter victory over sin and death, we ask all kinds of questions about when and where this victory comes in our lives.

Our scriptures are filled with stories of God's living water coming to the dry places in peoples lives... and to the dry places that the nation of Israel experienced. And God has come in unexpected ways... well... I would say... God comes in impossible ways... that's how far God will go... through the impossible... no chance... cannot happen... God happens...

Here is ageless story... Abraham and Sarah... the blessing... the promise from God is that a new nation would come through them... but no child... years pass... reproductively impossible... no chance... God happens and Isaac is born... living water... hope...

Moses... born in secret... shipped down the river... found by the daughter of the pharaoh... saved and named Moses – which means... drawn from the water... impossible... no chance... how many babies would survive that... God happens, and Moses becomes living water... hope...

Sampson... you know the guy with the long hair... the champion of the Israelites... his mom... infertile... can't have kids... reproductively impossible... no chance... God happens, and Sampson is born... read his story in the book of Judges... talk about sacrifice... living water... hope...

Samuel... the prophet... the guy who ends up doing the impossible by picking a little shepherd boy to be king... David... the king whose line leads to Jesus... but Samuel was never supposed to be born... his mom... Hannah... infertile... reproductively impossible... no chance... God happens... Samuel is born... living water... hope... John the Baptist... his parents... story sound familiar... yep... older than dirt... no chance of a baby... reproductively impossible... God happens... living water... hope...

Jesus... his mom... 13/14 years old... a virgin... no chance... God happens... and the Messiah is born... God's salvation is born... living water... hope...

We should all be so nostalgic... right... all except for the parts that keep us in the past... because each of these stories propels God's people into the future... with each birth... with each impossibility a new possibility comes to us... in our dry, cracked up lands... God happens... hope...

And with each of those stories of impossibility also comes a word that is so desperately needed. In each instance come the words... do not be afraid... words of hope... in each story all indications point to fear... but God reorients us to hope...even Moses' sister Miriam, having floated her little brother down the river, watches events unfold from a distance with fierce hope.

The story of God and God's people tell time and time again of how God enters into human history... not as some distant puppet master... but who enters into the grit and the grim... crawls along with us, interceding... not with fear... but with hope...

While we are talking about story... one of my favorites is about my daughter and her bedtime routine. Bath time... then reading time... prayer time... and then lights off time... but occasionally after lights off time we would hear the door open to her room and the little pitter patter of her feet coming down the hallway... down the stairs... and in all our parenting gumption we would place her back in bed over and over again... and we would ask her if she was going to stay in bed... she would say yes and about 5 minutes later... door open... pitter patter... I remember becoming increasingly frustrated... placed her back in bed yet again... and with a bit more force in my voice asked if she was going to stay in bed... and she looked up at me and said, "I hope to." Well, that melted my heart, and I realized that I was missing the whole deal... I was missing the whole point... so I made it a lot easier for her hope to come true... I crawled back in bed with her and she... cuddled up to me... held my hand... closed her eyes and fell asleep... her hope was with her... and that made all the difference.

You and I are a "hope to" people... and so were the people gathered on a road to Jerusalem over 2000 years ago. They were a "hope to" people who had been in dried and cracked land. And here came living water in the person of Jesus.

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Matthew 21:8-9

A large group of people who represented a much larger group of people, and a group of people that represent us today shouting Hosanna which we at times think means praise but it more closely means "Help us we pray." "Save us we pray." This is prayer of hope shouted. This is a prayer of hope that comes from a deep place of hope. This is a "hope to" people who pray a prayer of hope. And on this Palm Sunday it is our prayer too.

We shout the same prayer "Help us we pray!" And we know the end of the story. We know what is coming. We know the resurrection power that is headed our way with Easter. But we are not there yet.

We have yet to live what must have been the debilitating story of Jesus crying out in the garden for God to remove him from his arrest, imprisonment, and torture. Help us, we pray.

We have yet to live the crushing defeat of Jesus on the cross. Help us, we pray.

And we have yet to live the cosmic shift of an empty tomb that leads us out of those dry cracked places and brings us besides still waters. The impossible act of God but who enters into the grit and the grim... crawls along with us, interceding... not with fear... but with hope... restoring our soul.

So let us pray in this way "Hosanna, helps us we pray." Hosanna, save us we pray." May living water flow out of our believing hearts.