

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
The Rev. Dr. John Judson  
Own Your Hope: Giving It Away  
Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Peter 4:7-10  
June 1, 2014

One of the things that I always looked forward to as a teenager was the arrival of the New Yorker magazine. Now, I did not look forward to it because of its insightful articles. I didn't look forward to it because of the famous writers who graced its pages. No, I looked forward to it because of its cartoons. I loved their cartoons because they had the same wry, irreverent attitude that I had. There was always something just slightly offbeat about them in a way that newspaper cartoons seldom had. My favorites among those cartoons were the ones about the end of the world. There would be a man with a long beard, dressed in white robe carrying a sign that had something to do with the end of the world. It would say The End is Near and then there would be a twist in the cartoon. This week I went back to the web to look at some of those and here are two of my favorites. The first is a man with the sign, The End is Near. And then right behind him is another man with a sign saying, The End. The other was the same man with the sign, The End is Near, but this time in front of him is a man dressed in a pinstriped suit saying, "Yes, but what are your goals?" My guess anyone who has ever been in business gets it.

That one was my favorite not only because I sort of get it, but because I believe it is the perfect cartoon for Peter. Here's why. Peter begins this part of his letter with a statement that the end is near. In a sense he is the man with the beard, the robe and perhaps the sign. Just so that we are all clear, when Peter speaks of the end being near he is not speaking about the world ending and everyone being transported off of planet earth. What he means is that soon, Jesus will return and set everything aright. Jesus will return and suddenly the world will look like heaven. We might assume then that Peter would tell his followers to quit their jobs, and get ready for the end. But he doesn't. He gives them goals. First they are to love and love passionately. They are to love one another. They are to welcome one another. This means they are to welcome one another across all of the lines of wealth and class and status. They are to serve one another. This is an amazing goal...that someone who is a slave owner might serve a slave. The end is near...so let's get busy.

The question that confronts us is why would Peter do that? Why would Peter, believing that the end is near not run off into the wilderness like the Essenes, or called for absolute purity as did many Pharisees? Why would Peter do this? The best answer I can give is that Peter did so because he understood that in the interim between the moment of writing that letter and the moment Jesus arrived, that people needed hope. And that the followers of Jesus were those who were to give it. The Jesus' followers were to be hope-bearers. I realize that may seem a bit strange. How could this small community, by loving, welcoming and serving one another be bearers of hope? The answer to this question is that by so doing they are showing the world around them, the Roman Empire, what was ahead. They were showing the world that the kind of

community Jesus talked about could be a reality. And in that reality, people...people oppressed and abused; people dominated and cast out; people who had been held captive and had no hope of freedom...could see that a better world was on the horizon. Hope-bearers...that is what they were called to be. That was their goal.

This is what you and I are called to be as well. We are to be hope bearers. We can see this in the very language Peter uses in this letter. He calls' Jesus followers; he calls us a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. And the only reason that God called a people and made them a holy nation was that they had a job to do; a mission to accomplish. That mission was to bless the world. That mission was to bring hope to a hurting world. And my friends, we live in a world that needs hope. In a world in which school girls are kidnapped, hope is needed. In a world in which a young man can randomly gun down people, hope is needed. In a world in which hatred is spewed across the internet causing young people to take their own lives, hope is needed. And we can give it. We can show the world what hope looks like when we love one another; when we welcome one another; when we serve one another. We can show the world that there is something better...there is something real...there is something wonderful to be had and as Jesus followers we have it.

Andrew Solomon, an author and speaker, was saying that in the late 80s he headed to the Soviet Union to interview underground artists. He said that he expected to find people whose work was edgy and subversive. But that was not what he found. When he did not he asked the artist why not. The reply was that they were not trained to be artists but to be angels; angels giving back humanity to a people who had lost it.

You and I have been trained to be bearers of hope. We have been trained to given back humanity to a world in which it is taken from people in far too many ways. The question is, will we work toward our goal? Will we work toward our goal of being those who offer hope through love, welcome and service? So here is my challenge for you on this day, to ask yourselves, How am I bearing hope to the hurt around me? How am I bearing hope to he world?