

Third Sunday after Pentecost  
June 25, 2017  
Proper 7  
Sermon by Barbara Marshall

Psalm 86:1-10, 16,17  
Genesis 21:8-21

Romans 6:1b-11  
Matthew 10:24-39

The Bible is full of stories about people who experience agonizing darkness and hopelessness. There are also Bible stories of hope. We, too, experience times of hopelessness and hope.

The word hope is frequently in our vocabulary. We hear people say things like-

- I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow. We are planning a family picnic.
- I hope mom feels better soon.
- I hope my friend gets a better job.
- I hope I can lose weight before my son's wedding.
- I hope they find a cure for cancer some day soon.
- Seeing a beautiful sunset gives me hope.

I was reading a novel recently and was amazed as to how often the author used the word hope. I know I also use the word hope probably more than a couple of times a day.

Today's lessons are some examples of hope and hopelessness that God's people experienced

Life became hopeless for Hagar in the reading from Genesis. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had a son named Isaac. Abraham and Hagar, a slave woman, also had a son named Ishmael. Sarah saw Ishmael as a threat to Isaac's inheritance. When Hagar and her son were cast into the wilderness at the request of Sarah, Hagar felt hopeless. She saw her son dying from thirst and couldn't bear to watch. God opened her eyes to see hope. Was the well that she saw already there or did God miraculously provide a new well? It doesn't really matter because Hagar's heart moved from hopelessness to hope-full.

God intervened and ended up making a nation of both Abraham's offspring, Isaac and Ishmael.

In Psalm 86 David is praying. He was feeling poor and in misery. David was looking to the Lord for help and comfort. He was hopeful.

Matthew's Gospel tells us not to be afraid. We are of more value than sparrows. And even the hairs on our head are counted. If we are of more value than sparrows, does knowing that give us hope?

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When faced with an addictive relative in our family a few years ago, I prayed daily for a small glimmer of hope. But it didn't come for a long time. Our family was devastated as we watched our loved one facing arrests, court dates, severe anger problems, stealing to support his habit, and poor grades in school. He graduated from high school only because one of his teachers gave him a second chance. Then there was time spent in a work/release jail program and a two week period in rehab.

Our concern and hopeless feelings led us to learning more than we ever expected about the drug problems facing us and many others in today's society. Drug addiction can affect families regardless of how they live, where they live, their religious affiliation, or social/economic status.

We learned about two helpful organizations. The first one we attended was Families Against Narcotics also known as FAN, a non-profit, 501 c (3) organization. The organization helps overcome the social stigma of addiction. Many members of FAN have firsthand experience with alcohol or drugs in their homes. Some have loved ones in active addiction, others in recovery and sadly, some grieve a love one's death. Whatever the situation, FAN members share the same goal to make others aware through their own personal experience.

FAN counts among its members, recovering addicts, young people who have made the decision to stop the madness. Other members are parents, siblings, grandparents, police officers, social workers, teachers, court employees, religious leaders, friends of addicts, medical professionals and even a judge. The list of participants is endless. FAN's mission is "With FAN no family suffers alone." Meetings are held once a month in Fraser.

My first meeting with FAN was discouraging. I couldn't believe all the stories I heard. In some ways, our story was minor compared to others.

The speakers were informative but everything I was hearing was frightening and my hope for our loved ones recovery was dashed. But thankfully, I kept attending the monthly meetings and began to realize that you cannot love someone out of addiction. They have to want help and you begin to recognize the difference between helping and enabling. We were enabling because we tried to fix the problem. That didn't work.

I also joined Families Anonymous, known as FA. This group is for the family and friends of an addict. We meet weekly in Clinton Twp. and follow our own Twelve Step Program. We use a book called Today a Better Way. The immediate relief of finding people I could identify with was amazing. Their stories were similar to ours, and the other members were cheerful, helpful, supportive, and encouraging. At first some of their stories were frightening. I wasn't sure I could continue attending the meetings. But over time I felt my first ray of hope. I was learning how to cope with what seemed like a problem that wasn't going to go away any time soon.

Thankfully, after several long and trying years, our addict is doing well. He figured out what he had to do. But he had to do it for himself. He had to learn from his own mistakes and choose his own path to recovery. We praised him through each success. We learned "We can change ourselves-others we can only love."

Recently, Families Against Narcotics began an innovative approach to bring hope to those struggling with addiction. The affiliate program is called HOPE Not Handcuffs. The aim is to bring law enforcement, community organizations and individuals seeking assistance together in an effort to reduce dependency with heroin and prescription opiates.

A person struggling with drug addiction can come to any police agency in Macomb County, and hopefully other counties in the near future, and ask for help. They will be greeted with support, compassion and respect. If accepted into the program, the individual will be guided through a brief intake process to ensure proper treatment placement.

One of over 200 volunteer Angels will help with paperwork and provide compassionate support until a treatment option is found. Angel Kits such as blankets, snacks and water are provided. Transportation when necessary will take the individual to the hospital as needed or to a rehab facility.

Since February of this year, the Hope not Handcuffs community outreach program has helped well over 200 addicts. It is hoped the addicts will have a better chance of regaining control of their lives.

For those whose loved one has lost their battle with addiction, an Affiliate group of the Clinton Twp. Families Anonymous began last month. This is a grief support group presently using the name Tomorrow a Better Day. They meet twice a month. Their goal is to learn ways to move on beyond their grief and suffering despite a tragic loss of a friend or family member. Hopefully, tomorrow will be a better day as members discover peace and joy in a life they never expected to know again. Their loved one will forever live in their hearts.

Hope is not always a cure or a solution. It may not come miraculously or dramatically. Often, hope has to do with encountering a glimmer of light. Darkness does not have to be the final word, no matter how terrible or total the darkness seems to be. There can be light at the end of a tunnel.

Families Against Narcotics, Families Anonymous, Hope not Handcuffs and Tomorrow a Better Day offer a rainbow of hope for all affected by addiction. With helpful support groups and prayer, God can open our eyes to see hopeful days ahead.

I'd like to share one of the daily meditations found in our Families Anonymous book, Today a Better Way. It is titled Let Go and Let God and was written by a FA member.

Trying to cope with someone who misuses alcohol or other drugs or is verbally or physically abusive can cause such mental chaos that I may feel there is no help for me. In spite of my ceaseless efforts to solve all my problems, things seem to go from bad to worse. My best efforts are useless. I feel helpless and hopeless. I don't know where to turn or what to do.

When I am at my lowest point, face to face with my inability to manage or control, that is the moment I can acknowledge my need of a Power greater than myself. One of the greatest tools Families Anonymous has given me is the reminder, Let go and let God. My Higher Power can help me with the

things I cannot change or control if I truly let go and honestly admit that I am powerless over other people.

At times of crisis, when decisions have to be made and I am too distraught to think clearly, I need all the more to draw on the strength of my Higher Power and the experiences of other FA members. I cannot do it alone, but with the support of others who care, I can do what I need to do.

Today I will let go and let God, using the tools my FA program gives me.

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I have learned that the Twelve Step Program used by Families Anonymous is very similar to other recovery programs. The daily meditations can be applied to other relationships in my life. They bring me encouragement and hope.

Maria Goff, wrote in her book Love Lives Here “Love keeps us going, and hope moves our feet.”

Families Against Narcotics is having their annual fundraiser, Run Drugs Out of Town on Saturday, July 15<sup>th</sup>. St. Patrick’s Mission Fund has supported this event with a \$100 donation for several years. The monies raised are used to expand the programs of educating students, parents, medical professionals and others about drug abuse. FAN began in 2007 in Fraser, Michigan and now has about 14 chapters in our state.

Narcan is an antidote that when administered can bring back an individual who has overdosed until medical help arrives. It helps save lives and hopefully the addict will begin a recovery program. FAN has been instrumental in getting the use of Narcan into the hands of police and emergency technicians as well as parents living with addicts. It’s my understanding that Narcan will be available soon in pharmacies.

For more information on Run Drugs out of Town, see me or read about it on the bulletin board in the church hall. I also can provide information on all the support groups I spoke about this morning.

I am moving on. If you are able, I invite you to join me in changing hopelessness to hope! “Love keeps us going and hope moves are feet.”

Whether our lives have been touched by addiction, health issues, difficult relationships or other circumstances that lead us to feel hopeless, let us all lean on the One who is ever faithful and is our source of hope.

Sources for this sermon:

- Today a Better Way – page 31
- Families Against Narcotics Brochure
- Hope not Handcuffs Brochure
- Tomorrow a Better Way Brochure
- Love Lives Here, by Maria Goff
- Forward Day by Day for June 1 and 25, 2017
- Daily Guideposts 2017 story by Karen Barber, pages 28 and 29
- The New International Study Bible