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My grandpa grew up on a little farm in Sweden. They heated their home and cooked their food with a woodburning stove, and my grandpa and his little brother took turns chopping wood for the week. This troubled grandpa because his younger brother was always getting the job done faster than he was. Even though he was younger. One day, Grandpa saw his brother wandering into the barn's workshop when he was supposed to be cutting wood. Grandpa followed very quietly and sneakily hoping to catch his brother goofing around when he was supposed to be cutting wood. And there in the workshop, grandpa caught his brother red handed in the act of sharpening his little hatchet with a file. And then my grandpa understood his brother's secret. He was using a hatchet so sharp, it was almost like a kitchen knife.

These days not a lot of us are using hatchets so our families can cook their meals and heat their houses. We have different jobs to do and we need different tools to help us get those jobs done. And in that modern world, one of the tools we need is hope.

In her book *Hope in the Dark*, Rebecca Solnit says "Hope is not a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. It is an axe you break down doors with in an emergency." Certainly we need the axe of hope in emergencies, and we also need it in daily lives to help keep ourselves and our communities fed and warm. We need hope to live more into the teachings of Jesus because the Gospels are absolutely rooted in hope. They tell the story that something good is unfolding, whether it is apparent to us or not, and the goodness unfolding can not be stopped by anything, not even by death. It will have the victory -- eventually.

In our story from Scripture today, the story about how Peter healed a man who couldn't walk. Peter was filled with overpowering hope because that is what this time of life was like for him. Peter had hope because he was was on fire with this presence of God, and he must have felt that power in his bones. He could feel that as close to him as his own breath. He could feel it etched in his heart. That's what Peter must have been experiencing when this man asked him for money.

I want you to picture the whole scene that surrounded Peter and that man. That place where they met outside the temple gates was a crowded urban place. And there was probably a throng of people with disabilities begging there. We know that this lame man was brought to the same place to beg every day, and so probably other beggars were there every day too. I expect they got to know one another well as the years passed.

And the pedestrians who passed through this little community of beggars wondered out loud sometimes what kind of sins the beggars had committed that made them deserve their disabilities. We know that people said that kind of thing because Jesus' own disciples said that. In the Gospel. So day after day, these beggars had to humbly ask for money from people who were blatantly looking down on them. People of that era knew perfectly well that begging was a

hard life. In the book of Sirach, which is included in Catholic Bibles, we hear that it is better to die than to beg

What other choice did these people have though? In a culture that did not make space for them to contribute their talents and their gifts to the community in any other way?

It seems clear to me that the biggest thing that needed healing in this situation was not one man's legs. The bigger thing that needed healing was the community that had him sitting there day after day with no other way to make a living while people looked down on him.

So in the Scripture here, Peter was walking past beggars on his way to the temple. People had probably begged from him in that same place before, but this time, this time when a man asked him for money, Peter said I don't have money, but I will give to you what I have. And what Peter had with him was a hope let him possibilities that anyone else might consider impossible. Peter had wild abundance of God's love and healing power, which flowed into that man. The man's legs were healed. He was overjoyed. He was leaping around and praising God and hugging Peter and everyone in that crowded area was filled with wonder. It was an amazing, amazing time.

But sitting outside that gate, day after day, probably until they died, were the disabled companions of that man who was healed. And the people still looked down on them every day. The problem of exclusion and injustice was not healed. And for a lot of people the daily humiliations and deprivations were not healed.

Today too, we can see so many things in our community that are still not healed.

We still do not prioritize the inclusion of people with disabilities so that our community can be enriched by every talent and gift from God.,

People of color and immigrants being systemically excluded, impoverished and targeted for violence.

Gender-based violence and harassment still ends lives and cripples peoples futures.

Environmental destruction has reached a critical point and is contributing to such havoc in our country that even the sun has turned red with grief.

The global pandemic has caused isolation and fear and grief and hunger and economic distress.

Regular people across the country are hearing the message that they should take up arms.

And all of this needs healing, and that can feel terrifying.

Where does that leave for us? It leaves a space BETWEEN THE VISION OF A HEALING POWER OF GOD and THE CLEAR AND GRINDING SUFFERING OF THE WORLD.

FRIENDS WHAT IS GOING TO FILL THAT SPACE?

We have got to make room hope in that space. Because hope is a powerful tool. It helps us break down the doors we need to break down and to chop up the kindling that keeps the community warm.

Hope gives us a vision that lets us see beyond our circumstances guides us to a vision of might be and what should be. Hope gives us energy to pursue a better future when grief and confusion weigh us down.

Hope is a manifestation of God's grace that endures through all things. And with hope in our hands we are stronger and better equipped to do the work we need to do.

But we need to keep our hope keen and strong. On purpose in times like this. We don't want our hopes to get dull.

But where do we look when we want to make our hope stronger? Where do we find it?

Over the summer I asked that question of a lot of people in this congregation and this is what I heard.

I heard from people that faith gives us hope. I heard about the faith that whatever we are going through now is preparing us for the holy job that awaits us next. I heard faith in God that is upholding us always, pushing through like dandelions through cracked concrete or like rain falling on drought-strickens soil. I heard faith in a God that never deserts us.

Our connection with other people gives us hope too. People in this congregation told me about how we are built to connect with one another and to serve one another. Sometimes we live into that by doing something formal like serving on the care ministry team, but we also live into it in informal ways all the time. We share meals together, we talk, we hold the door open for the person behind us. We keep an eye out for one another. We share the wonders of life together, like by enjoying pie as a family or by gardening with grandchildren, even if we have to be together through the miracle of video calls.

I also heard that it gives us hope to know that people are fighting hard for a better world.

I heard an appreciation for local farmers, who are working to heal the environment and build a sustainable food system.

I heard about college students who are preparing themselves to make positive changes to our world.

I heard about Black Lives Matter activists who are taking great risks to disrupt the patterns of white supremacy that have plagued our nation since before it even became a nation.

I heard about the revered civil rights leader John Lewis who urged us to follow the deepest callings of our heart and to stand up for what we truly believe and who told us that it is now our turn to let freedom ring.

And I will add to this list late Ruth Bader Ginsberg who said that a meaningful life is not one that is lived for one's self but for one's community. Ruth Bader Ginsberg urged us to fight for the things we care about.

Well we are going to have to take her advice, aren't we? We are going to have to fight for the things that we care about with everything we have got.

The task before us is overwhelming, but take a moment to discern if you might have a job to do in the name of justice, in the name of love. Maybe the job before you is grand in scope, or maybe it seems insignificant because you too are suffering with limitations. When it is done in the spirit of Christ's love, no action is insignificant, no words are insignificant, no prayer is insignificant. Your presence here counts, and your work counts, even if you and God are the only ones who see it for now.

And through it all remember that like Peter, the love of God is etched in our very hearts, it is as close to us as our own breath, and the Holy Spirit is moving within us all.

Benediction:

God bless us with healing
So that we may be transformed

God comfort us
So that we may share the delight you take in all your children

God forgive us
So that we may see ourselves the way you see us.

God keep our hope keen and strong
So that we may go forth guided by your revolutionary love.

Amen