



“Hey Dave—Pass the Pitch!”

Exodus 1: 8-10,22, 2: 1-10

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I really, really like to preach about hope. And optimism. And belonging. My faith assures me that God has me. God has US. That hope, that faith is at my core. It's straight from the New Testament. It's the Good News! And every time I stand in this pulpit, I want to share that hope – the Good News—with all who will listen.

And yet these days it's just tough. Hope is getting stomped on by human feet in every corner of the globe.

We need not do extensive research to find darkness in this world created by human hands. Here in the US, racial tensions are boiling over and Christ's gospel is being co-opted by people hungry for violence. In London, Egypt, Paris and Barcelona, bombs are killing innocents “in the name of God.”ⁱ Even from the Vatican, a new edict was issued last week which excludes more people from receiving the body of Christ in communion.ⁱⁱ

Thank God King David wrote Psalm 124: “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” We've already said it many times this morning. It just sounds more powerful when we say it as a group. Will you say it with me?

“Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

Thank goodness we have the Psalms to help us through the darkest times in life. And through the darkest stories in the Bible.

There is perhaps no darker story than the first half of this morning's scripture. It's a story of state sanctioned murder. Every male baby born to the Hebrews is to be killed? Every sweet smelling, soft, snuggly innocent infant boy must be destroyed? And why? Because the man in charge is scared. Pharaoh senses his powerful grip over Egypt is threatened by the sheer number of Hebrew slaves. Pharaoh fears an uprising. He makes a cold, calculated strategic

decision. Instead of lightening the burden borne by the Hebrews, he increases it. Instead of showing mercy, he issues orders to double down on death. This is a dark, dark story.

Can we say it again? *“Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”*

This week the eclipse came oh so close to Atlanta. I’m ashamed, but I admit it. While I was interested enough to pay attention, I was not committed enough to battle logistics and drive a few hours north to observe the eclipse in its totality. Raise your hand if you went for it and traveled!? Well done, well done. I was here, just inside the perimeter and I felt the temperature drop a bit. I noticed the sun got less bright. But for those of us thinking that a 97% eclipse equals almost total darkness? No! We were wrong. It was not to be. In fact, if it were not for the media letting me know that it was coming, I may have missed the entire eclipse just hanging out in my house watching ESPN. Dave Fry’s adolescent next door neighbor expressed his enthusiasm clearly with an underwhelmed sigh of, “This is so boring!”

Who knew that just 3% of the sun’s light would still overpower the darkness?

Every person that traveled to see the total eclipse, full coverage, where the moon entirely blotted out the sun, will tell you it was amazing. Other-worldly. Life-altering. They felt the coolness on their skin. They heard the silence of the birds and the rise of the crickets’ chirping. They saw not blackness but a deep blue-silver everywhere. You heard it right, the blackness had a silver lining. Rev. Jennie Sankey told me that in the North Georgia mountains, “Even the shadows shimmered.”

Let’s say it together: *“Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”*

Perhaps the ominous shadows we see everywhere today are **not** what we think. Perhaps as we sink into the world’s darkness and experience it fully, as our traveling friends experienced the full eclipse, we can see that it is not blackness but a deep blue-silver everywhere. Attorney and interfaith activist Valerie Kaur says even now she can feel the spirit of ever rising optimism. She wonders if the darkness in this world right now isn’t the darkness of the tomb *but the darkness of a womb*.ⁱⁱⁱ Hear it again: *perhaps the darkness in this world right now isn’t the darkness of the tomb but the darkness of a womb*. As Christians, we know that even the tomb isn’t about death, but about resurrection. So now isn’t a time to get swallowed up by darkness. It’s a time to look for new life. As we get pushed deeper and deeper into the depths by each new expression of exclusion in this world, we can look for new ways of shining Christ’s light into the darkness. The Gospel of John says, “For the light [Christ!] shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”^{iv}

We will hear evil words. And as Dave preached last Sunday, the way to defeat that hate *is not with more hate, but with love*. The way to defeat darkness *is with light*. The way to conquer

death *is to birth new life*. While seemingly powerful people and groups in this world spread darkness everywhere, we can turn to Exodus for inspiration.

Go back and read Exodus one and two. You'll find that while many followed the murderous orders of Pharaoh, two Hebrew midwives defied him by tricking him and using his singular, unenlightened understanding of the Hebrew people against Pharaoh. The Hebrew mother of a little baby defied Pharaoh's darkness through clever hiding and preparing a basket of transport. The Hebrew sister of the baby defied Pharaoh's darkness by arranging for that baby's own mother to continue nourishing him as a wet nurse. And perhaps most courageously, a person of power, the Pharaoh's daughter, the princess who not only shared family blood lines but a roof with this man, dared to defy her father's dark orders to kill baby Moses.

Say it with me: *"Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."*

Surely this riveting story isn't a series of coincidences. It took the individual choices of many people (all women, I might add 😊) to allow Moses to live and flourish. It took smarts and daring and cunning and persistence and courage to shine some light into the darkness. All God-given talents that these women put to good use.

"Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

"Preacher, how about the Hebrew babies that did die? Where was God when that happened? And how about when it happens today, when cancer steals years from our families or our loved one takes his own life?"

Gosh, I wish I had the answer to those questions. I ask them myself, over and over again. I only know that more darkness would be in this world without each of us using our God-given smarts and daring and cunning and persistence and courage to shine light into the darkness.

My lovely friend Martha adopted a child in need. Kathleen reads to refugee children. Scott shares quarters and prayers at Laundry Love. *And the light grows, and the darkness has not overcome it*. Pat and Beth commit a day to learning about a faith foreign to them. Jean volunteers at Decatur Emergency Assistance Ministry. Deb hammers nails. *And the light grows, and the darkness has not overcome it*. Claudia lobbies at the state capitol. Lane listens and soothes her anxious friend. Nurse Jane gives shots at free health clinics. Kathy stocks the freezer and Tim delivers meals. Many of you care for aging parents. All of us support the missions of this church. *And the light grows and the darkness has not overcome it*.

Say it with me: *"Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."*

Perhaps the most familiar piece of scripture to all Christians is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may

have eternal life.” That’s the Good News. But please know we should also be equally enthralled with John 3:17: “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Don’t discount the light that shines through what we are called to do as Christians. One small candle can illuminate an entire room.

The gospel says to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. No hateful chanting, no exploding bomb, no murderous Pharaoh can compete with the power of the gospel, with a Son sent into this world “so it might be saved through him.” This I know and trust.

As Dave prepares to retire (*and we prepare to let him retire!*), I see us together preparing that basket for the river just as Moses’ mother did so many years ago. We don’t know what will happen to this church but we know the church must survive without founding pastor, Dave Fry. Together with Dave, all of us will line a basket with a blanket and then plaster the outside with bitumen and pitch. We’ll send someone who cares about this church to watch from a distance to see what happens-- and perhaps to help when the basket finds a new caretaker. And as this church moves away from the dry land, from our familiar earthy bank and begins to float downstream, we’ll trust that God has this church. And even if the basket floats into darkness, if we peer through our special glasses of faith, we’ll be able to see that silver lining. That place that we fear may be a dark ending *is actually a new beginning*. And from that place, this church and our world will rise to a place of new hope, new optimism and expansive belonging.

Amen.

ⁱ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4473704/Interactive-map-terrorist-attacks-2017.html>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.catholic.org/news/hf/faith/story.php?id=75455>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.sikhnet.com/news/video-valarie-kaur-delivers-rousing-speech-church>

^{iv} John 1: 5