

## Emerging with Hope

At the beginning of 2020, New Hope Church and Mt. Scott Church of God had big decisions to make. In a practical, material sense, those decisions revolved around property and buildings. But spiritually and holistically, those decisions had more to do with discernment, stewardship and faith.

In the gospels, Peter clearly wanted to be all he could be for Jesus, whom he loved and admired. I think Jesus saw that in Peter. Matthew 14 records Jesus inviting Peter, in the middle of a threatening storm, in the darkness of night, to step out of the safety of the boat and walk on the water with Him. Peter bravely **got out of the boat!** Sometimes we skip right over that! But in Peter's fledgling faith, he did it—he stepped over the edge, out of the boat, into the wildness of that storm. If you are familiar with the story, you know that Peter then looked down at the threatening waves around him and began to go down.

This year, our two congregations *stepped out of the boat* as we sensed God calling. New Hope Church courageously stepped out of the building where some of you have worshipped for decades. Mt. Scott Church, after losing a Purchase Sale Agreement in the early stages of the pandemic, bravely opened our hand and stepped into an adoption conversation with New Hope.

Just like Peter, we have taken these steps in the middle of a storm. A raging pandemic, a divided country, and in some cases, a divided church. What is it about our story, and about our God, that enables us to emerge from a year like 2020 with a sense of hope?

Corrie Ten Boom, survivor of the Holocaust said, "*Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.*" In the craziest year many of us have ever experienced, God has done some pretty incredible things. In reality, the future is always unknown, but currently, there is a heightened awareness of uncertainty in the air. How is this blending of our congregations going to play out? How is the new Biden administration going to change the country? Will the economy tank? Will someone I love contract COVID-19 and get really ill? Will the vaccine be as effective as we hope?

For those who have followed Jesus in our own fledgling faith some for decades, we have the advantage of experience—we have, as Corrie Ten Boom said, *a known God*. In the Old Testament, the Israelites told their faith stories over and over again. They marked their God-moments through feasts, fasts, celebrations, and observances. They did this so that they themselves, and future generations, would remember deep in their DNA, the absolute steady faithfulness of God.

One way we can emerge from 2020 with hope is to follow this pattern. To acknowledge, to rehearse, to celebrate, what God has done. For us collectively to remember *THIS* story of God's faithfulness to two congregations who were willing to get out of the boat, bringing us together, strengthening us, thereby opening up new opportunities, enabling us to serve, grow, and thrive "*better together*" than apart. God has made Himself known this year in this way. How have you, how has your family, experienced God's faithfulness this year? I know Fred and I have. **Acknowledge, rehearse, and celebrate.**

As a leadership team, we would like to encourage you to reflect on this year, as hard as it has been, and pay attention to your *God-moments*. One way to acknowledge, rehearse, and celebrate is to actually pay attention to those end of the year reports we receive from non-profits, or Christmas letters from believing friends. They tell a story of faithfulness, if we pay attention.

I use the *You Version* Bible App on my devices. They recently published *2020 In Review* on their app. They reported that God did unprecedented things with their Bible app this year. They experienced *52 million* more people around the globe downloading the Bible, bringing the downloads to over 450 million. *22 million* kid's Bible apps were downloaded in 2020!

We can emerge hopeful—even if we falter, or have faltered like Peter did in the middle of his courage—because Jesus was right there, rescuing and teaching. It was His own faithfulness, not necessarily Peter's, that bore witness to this. Matthew writes that, when Peter faltered and cried out, Jesus immediately reached out for Peter and asked, "*Why did you doubt me?*" The next verse says as they got back in the boat, the disciples worshiped Jesus and exclaimed, "*You really are the Son of God!*" It is reassuring that God uses even our times of doubt, our faltering, to highlight His steady presence and rescuing reach.

Let's purposefully emerge hopeful from this year as we acknowledge, rehearse, and celebrate what we know about God. He loves the world generously and unendingly. One of His names is *Emmanuel - God with us*. He is for us. He desires our wholeness, our *Shalom*. He is strong when we are weak. He is the best father, mother, big brother that we could hope for, all rolled into one.

Maybe you are listening today and God is not a "*known*" entity for you. You don't have a clue whether He is faithful or fickle. In the gospels— Mathew, Mark, Luke and John—Jesus invited curious people to just *come and see*. To decide for yourself.

We at New Hope would love to be people who invite you to do just that—to come and see and decide for yourself.