

“Help me Obi Wan Kenobi. You’re my only hope.”

You’ve probably heard that line before, right? The late, great Carrie Fischer said it in the first Star Wars movie. She also says: We are in our most desperate hour. This message was a last-ditch attempt to get help for the rebellion against the evil Empire, and for those of you who are confused, I’ll just say this: Darth Vader. She needs help because Darth Vader is the bad guy. She records this message right when she’s about to get taken hostage.

So let’s sit back and enjoy the movie! Just kidding. I know it’s father’s day, but hello: We’re still in church. But what I’m getting at is: this is an example of hope that goes beyond understanding. This is a crazy hope. A hope that goes beyond reason.

Because Leia doesn’t know who the heck Obi Wan Kenobi is. All she knows is that he fought alongside her dad in a war decades earlier. Leia has hope in him JUST FROM STORIES SHE HEARD FROM HER DAD. This is what I’d call an indiscriminate hope, a hope that doesn’t take circumstance into consideration, that doesn’t allow common sense to dictate whether it makes sense. Even when she’s about to get kidnapped by Darth Vader, she has hope in this old guy who she’s never met.

Right now, we’re in our third week of a series we’re calling Indiscriminate, and we’re looking at the way that Jesus lived a life of indiscrimination, a life that stretched beyond what we think is sensible, beyond what we think is reasonable. My name’s Emma, and yes, I’m a Star Wars fan but I’m also the pastor of community life here at Harbor and part of our teaching team, and I’m going to be talking to you about indiscriminate hope, what that looks like.

And we’re going to dig into passage that gets at this indiscriminate hope. A hope that applies all over the place, that is deeper than your everyday, normal hope. A hope that withstands trials, desperate hours, and things like Darth Vader and the Emperor. Let’s take a look: We’ll be in **Romans 8:17b-25**.

*In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. 18 Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. 19 For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. 20 Against its will, all creation was subjected to God’s curse. But with eager hope, 21 the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay. 22 For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. 24 We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don’t need to hope for it. 25 But if we look forward to something we don’t yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.*

Okay. So if we were going to do a word search of this passage, we'd find hope. There's hope here in this passage. And hope is generally a nice word, right? HOPE. It's a happy word. But then when you think about that word, when do you usually hear it?

"Help me Obi Wan Kenobi. You're my only hope." That's a tough situation, this is a last ditch effort.

"We must accept finite disappointment, but not lose infinite hope." Martin Luther King Jr., speaking about how we face with one of our country's deepest sins: racism, violence, and injustice against non-white people.

Maybe you've said this before: "I hope we get good news."

Or: "I hope my luck turns around."

I know for a fact that 90% of you have said this at some point: "I really hope the weather changes to [fill in the blank – warmer, colder, less rain, more rain, no snow, etc.]"

We say the word "hope" when something not so good is happening, or when things are uncertain, right? And the same goes for this passage here in the Bible. Here, hope is surrounded by not so pleasant words. Words like: Suffering. Groaning. Pain. Waiting. When I started work on this sermon, I realized **hope is a word that comes when we're in need.** Hope is something we want, something that we need to have injected into our lives because life is hard...and we don't control everything.

But most of the time we say "hope," and it has more to do with what we want. Hope is usually about erasing whatever bad stuff is going on in my life, the discomfort and uncertainty or sadness. We want hope to be the thing that saves us: as long as I have a little hope, then I can get through this thing. But to quote Francis Bacon, "hope is a good breakfast but a bad supper:" And what that means is: if all you have is hope at the end of the day without anything to base it on, then it's no good. If you start off hopeful and cheerful, but then have nothing to base that hope on at the end, then there's a problem. It's empty. It won't sustain you long term.

Hope needs to be based on something REAL, something CONCRETE, something firm, something we can hang anything and everything on. We depend on it, so it has to be substantial.

And the hope we're reading about here in the book of Romans is that kind of firm, substantial foundational kind of hope. The Greek word for hope being used here in this passage, *elpis*, refers to hope that exists outside of people. It isn't something we generate. This hope is exclusively God's gift to humans. This hope is a *thing outside of us*, not a *feeling that depends on us*

*Elipis is God's hope. It is God's gift to us, something substantial, and based on something deeper. It's there even when you don't feel very hopeful. God gives us this hope. The hope that we have here, the hope that is the gift of God, is rooted in something deeper.*

Let's look back at the passage.

*But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. 18 Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. 19 For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are.*

*20 Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, 21 the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.*

When things look bad, when we turn to Jesus and say: Help me, Jesus, you're my only hope, what are we saying to him? When we are waiting, when all creation is waiting, broken, things are dying, people are dying, we see earthquakes, we see war, we see starvation, we experience disappointment, we experience loss, when we're groaning, crying out, suffering, and we ask God: God, give me hope, What are we asking, exactly? What is it that Jesus has to offer us to base our hope on? What is this hope? What is this elpis?

Elipis, Hope, is built on the truth that God will do something we can't: REDEEM THIS WORLD and REDEEM US.

Our hope is that God can SAVE US and rescue us from death and decay.

Our hope is that our current, broken world is only temporary. And that God's glory is ETERNAL.

And we need this hope. We really need this gift of hope.

Because the truth is: In this life, we are going to suffer.

If we are going to be taking up our crosses and following Jesus, the way he asks, we have to be ready to share in his suffering. As Paul says here in Romans, "If we are to share in his glory we must also share in his suffering." We want to share in the glory ahead, yes. And this glory is beyond what we can imagine here on earth. But in order to do that, in order to share Jesus' glory, we must (not maybe, not could) must share in Christ's sufferings. And we get through these sufferings through God's gift of Hope.

To be honest with you, my gut reaction is: I don't like this. I'm a "why" person. I want to dig underneath, get to the bottom of it. I just have to ask: Why? Why do we have to go through this? Why, God, do we need hope? Why can't we just have eternity and new creation now?

Well, for one thing, it's just the reality of this world. It's broken. It's unfair. People are broken and unfair. Even creation is broken and unfair. Do you all remember when Planet Earth came out? It was so beautiful, but it was also really sad at times – you hear these horrible stats about how these are the last kind of snow leopard and they'll probably go extinct, or you see a baby elk getting taken down and eaten alive by arctic wolves, and then you also feel kind of bad because arctic wolves need to eat too, but jeez, that's harsh and sad. And you see creation groaning – that there just isn't enough for everyone it seems, and the planet is being abused and destroyed by people, and it's a struggle to survive.

And that's just creation. We see that with people, too. We see people who never got a fair shake of it; who maybe made one mistake and it ruined their lives, or maybe got into a terrible accident, or maybe just didn't get the right education, or just struggled with some debilitating mental or physical ailment. Or we see social ills, like this opiate epidemic happening right now, child abuse, racism and bigotry, sexism, homophobia. Whatever it is: we see creation groaning.

That's what we see. Creation suffers. We suffer.

When you choose LIFE, when you choose to believe in Jesus, and you choose to follow Him, you might find that instead of life suddenly becoming EASY, you find things getting HARDER. You notice all the suffering around you. And you find that you are at odds with this broken world when you chose to follow Jesus.

You know how salmon have to swim upstream to lay their eggs in freshwater? It makes NO SENSE. It's very weird. They leave the ocean and swim up the river to where it's safe, but it's SUPER HARD. And bears show up and grab them and eat them while they're trying to hop up the river, going the wrong way. But they do this, have done this, over and over again, and why? Because of HOPE, a fishy-version of hope – they know that the future of their species depends on this crazy, against the grain journey.

And the same goes for us: Before following Jesus, we were going downstream, heading out to the ocean. But when we decide to follow Jesus, to allow him to change us, to turn us around, instead of getting flushed out to sea with the river, we get turned around and swim the other way, against the current.

When we follow Jesus, it can feel like we're going the wrong way, facing obstacles left and right, swimming upstream. But at the end of that journey is life. Like Jake said, eternity is so much longer than that little red mark on the end of that long rope. We have our eyes on the future, the larger picture. Like those salmon, we know the suffering and struggle is worth it, because that's what our future depends on.

All this is to say: we shouldn't be surprised by struggle. We are making a deliberate choice to live life differently. So we shouldn't be surprised when we invite Jesus to transform our lives, to change us, and then we encounter suffering.

We should not be surprised by suffering because Jesus suffered. Jesus' life was filled with opposition, tension, difficulties, discomfort – he was constantly traveling, he had nowhere to rest his head, he was constantly surrounded by crowds, having to deal with super religious people accusing him of being a heretic and a bad person just because he healed someone on the wrong day! So we are also going to encounter resistance and struggle, too.

We are going to encounter suffering. To share in Christ's glory, which is a resurrected life, a new life, we must also share in his sufferings. But this is where hope comes in: let's look at it.

*19 For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. 20 Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, 21 the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. 22 For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

Okay, not to be totally sexist or whatever but: can you tell Paul, who wrote this passage, hasn't experienced the pains of childbirth? Because he describes creation as "groaning," from the pain. It might be more accurate to just put "groans" in quotation marks, you can fill it in with whatever verb you'd like, Screams. Certain 4 letter words.

But there's truth about what hope is in this metaphor.

Like childbirth, we have hope despite experiencing our suffering, despite the brokenness for two reasons:

One, the suffering won't last forever. When I was in labor with Clementine, I believe I said: "She is never going to be born, EVER." Not to be graphic, but I was pushing for almost three hours! I seriously was starting to think it wasn't going to happen. "She is NEVER going to be born!" Right after I threw up, I think I said that. And I totally believed it. But there was hope because: Surprise! Clementine was born, and she's now 9 months old, so I was wrong.

In the midst of suffering, it's tough. It's tough for us to have hope. It may feel as though it's going to last forever. That we're never going to see that future glory that Paul is writing about here. As it says here in the scripture, all creation was subject to God's curse. ALL OF IT. It was a truly sad thing that happened in the garden. God's beautiful and perfect creation was cursed, and as a result, creation groans.

But, like a woman who is suffering through childbirth, there is hope. Because it is going to end. It doesn't last forever. No woman in the history of time has been in labor for eternity. As far as I know...

The second reason why this metaphor works so well when it comes to hope is that in the midst of the suffering, something NEW is coming. Something beautiful. My OB described labor well.

He said: "Sure, it's a lot of pain, but in this case, you get a present at the end!" A woman who is laboring isn't suffering for nothing. ~~This isn't hope as a bad supper.~~ This isn't empty hope.

There is a reason for that hope at the end: like a beautiful child, our hope is for a new and beautiful world.

A new heaven and a new earth. A fresh start. And there is hope for those of us who are suffering for Jesus' sake –verse 21 says: "glorious freedom from death and decay." That is the promise from Jesus, that's the end game. It is reassurance that there is more to life than just this, right now. Jesus promises us that we will have new life. That we will have new bodies. We will be like him, and we will be raised from the dead, resurrected and new, perfected life – that is what Jesus offered us.

Amen! Thank God sin doesn't have control over us because of Jesus! Thank God that we will someday have resurrected bodies that will never get old, never get sick, never break! All creation is going to be REDEEMED, made into something WHOLE. This is our current hope. This is our present hope, our hope RIGHT NOW: Our hope is in Jesus. We sing those words: "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." We find our hope there and there alone, in the cross, in his sufferings, and in his resurrection. Like another song we sing here at Harbor: "The Resurrected King is Resurrecting me."

I apologize in advance for going all English major on you all, but did you notice in those lyrics that it's "the resurrect-ed king is resurrect-ing me." That this is a process. It is ongoing. It has started. And it continues on. It has already happened. It is here now. We are "resurrecting" not "resurrected."

If we believe in the gospel account in the word of God, when we choose to follow Jesus, when we say: "YES, Jesus, I am going to follow you! I believe that you are God, that you rose from the dead, and that you are bringing me back to life: that you are the resurrected king and you are Resurrecting me!" Just like that song says, our hope isn't in this world anymore. Our hope is built on something else.

Jesus' resurrection has happened. It has already happened. It is here. But in some ways, it also ISN'T here yet. We are living in a broken world, and there is sin around us, and we still sin. Jesus has come, the Holy Spirit is here with us, we are in the ALREADY. But we're also in the NOT YET. The ALREADY and the NOT YET. One of those tough concepts that the churches has said for centuries: Living in the already and the not yet. We have been saved, we have been redeemed, bought by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. We are made new creations. Jesus has come and saved us ALREADY. But there's also the NOT YET: We still suffer. We still wait. We still have imperfect bodies that grow old. We still get sick. Creation still groans and suffers.

The already and the not yet.

Because the truth is: God's restoration of this world is not ALL here. The baby hasn't been born yet. The new heaven and new earth aren't here yet. This is still the waiting, the toiling, the suffering, the pain, in anticipation of the new life that is to come.

This world has been going through a long, long labor. And this labor could go on for thousands more years. We don't know when Jesus will be back. We don't know when God will restore all things, make a new heaven and a new earth.

We live in the already and the not yet. It's like it's two things at once, which is kind of frustrating.

Our Hope is for NOW: we have Hope, God's gift already. Hope is present.

But hope is also future. You know how someone is a mother even if their baby isn't born yet? The baby is in existence, but not actually *here* here yet? That is what our hope is: Both here and now, and yet also not here.

We are also HOPING. We continue to HOPE. We already have hope for right now. But we are also still HOPING. We have it currently, right now, but we're also DOING it. We have hope right now that this isn't it, AND we continue hope-ing. Hope is present and hope is future. While we experience new life, while we become new creations through Jesus, while we enjoy and live in that "already" there is another part of it. There is the "not yet." We are waiting to become new creations. We are waiting for full healing. Full redemption.

Okay, so I want people who are at the end of their rows to look under their seats. There's a little bowl of candies there and I want you to pick it up and take TWO and pass it down. EVERYONE TAKE TWO OF THOSE CANDIES.

Now, as you get them, you'll see that I didn't just pick any ol' piece of candy. Those are NOW AND LATER. Now you should have two of them in your hands, and I want you to take one of those. One of those is going to be "NOW." One of those is the ALREADY. So when you accept Jesus, that's when you get that "Now" candy. Let's open them up, go ahead, eat that ONE. But only ONE.

This is the already. When we accept Jesus, we get some of what new life is. We get a taste of it. But Wait. There's this other one, because you took two. But This one is the "LATER." Now and Later. This other candy is the "NOT YET." You're eating the "Already." But that other one is the not yet. You know that you have it. You know that it's there. But you can't have it now. It's for later. It's for after church, your ride home. So right now, as you're sitting there, eating one piece of candy but holding onto the other, are experiencing the already and the not yet.

And that's what we're living in right now. We are in the already and the not yet. We are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth. We are waiting to take the paper off that second piece of candy. We are waiting for new life, even while we are experiencing a taste of it. But it's not now. It's the Not Yet.

So we may be experiencing hardship but we hold onto this hope, this other taste that is waiting for us in the future. This is the Not Yet.

Which leads me to another reason we have hope: we have hope in the midst of this suffering, this long waiting time, is because of what it does to us. We change, and we become more like Jesus.

Here's what Paul says, only a few chapters earlier in this same book in the Bible, Romans 5:2-4:

*2 Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. 3 We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. 4 And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.*

If we dig deeper into what we see here, we can see that there's a trajectory, an inherent connection for those of us who are following Jesus, between trials and development of character and hope. The more we struggle, the more we build endurance, and the more we build endurance, the more we become hopeful.

About eight years ago, Jeff and I were like, "Let's get into shape." And there was this cemetery right next to our condo that had a loop around it that was almost half a mile, and it was nice and quiet, so we were like, yeah, we'll go for a jog around that loop, get into shape. And this is coming from the girl who was like that cartoon Daria, do you remember the opening credits where she's supposed to be playing volleyball, and the ball goes past her in gym class and she sticks her hand out after it's flown right by her? That was me.

So when Jeff and I tried to just do a little jog from like, literally, here to here, I had to stop because I was pretty sure I was going to die. I remember just stopping and being like this... I couldn't straighten up.

Let's just say, I have a flair for the dramatic. I said something like: "I WILL NEVER EVER BE ABLE TO DO THIS!!!"

And Jeff said, "Well, you just have to keep going because that's the only way you can build up endurance."

And I said: "I CAN'T! IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! I'M COMPLETELY INCAPABLE!"

Needless to say: I had little to no hope, at all. But I kept on suffering because I am dramatic, but also stubborn. So I would keep trying, building things up little by little, and things became more hopeful, slowly yet surely. When I could run one mile, I thought, hey, maybe I can do this.



And then when I could run two, three, four miles, I was pretty hopeful! Because I was doing it. I had confidence in myself. I no longer despaired. I had hope. It was the best shape I've ever been in. It's like a dream, now.

That's what Hope in our salvation in the midst of trials and suffering is. We build endurance, we are able to endure because we change: we become more like Jesus, and as we become more like Jesus we become more confident in our salvation through him. We become more hopeful.

**Conclusion:**

This is Indiscriminate Hope: that even when things are at their bleakest, even when there it doesn't look like there's a chance, we still have hope. When it goes from bad to worse, our hope doesn't dissolve, but becomes STRONGER. Our hope is God's gift. Our hope is made stronger in the midst of suffering. Our hope is rooted in Christ, and it is for both now and not yet.

Sometimes that hope feels like a little thread we can barely feel in our hands while we're clinging to it. But we hold onto that hope, knowing it has nothing to do with us – it's from God.

When we have this hope, we can say: Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow on the sunny days and on the rainy days. In feast and in famine. Through the joyful times, and through the sad times. Because our hope is Indiscriminate – it doesn't depend on us or on our circumstances, but on the Gift of Hope, ELPIS, from God.

When we live in God's gift of hope, we would have an eternal perspective. We weren't made to end – we were made to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. And our hope is built on Jesus Christ and his righteousness and nothing else – we have no standing before God without it.

So as we wait in the Already and the Not Yet, as we receive and live in hope, and continue hoping, in the midst of struggle and suffering, we can remain firm and steadfast in His promise of restoration and resurrection.

To close, I want to pray a prayer of blessing over you from Romans 15- Will you bow your heads and allow me to pray this for you?

13 I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.