

EVERYONE MEANS EVERYONE

Delivered at Litchfield Community Church Presbyterian on September 21, 2025

Amos 8:4-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-7

When the fall of Jerusalem was at hand, the Israelites in Jerusalem cried out: *The snorting of [the] horses [of Nebuchadnezzar's army can be heard all the way] from Dan [135 miles away]; at the sound of the neighing of their stallions the whole land quakes. They come and devour the land and all that fills it, the city and those who live in it.¹ We look for peace, but find no good, for a time of healing, but there is terror instead.²* We are in another such time, where division and senseless violence have moved the nation to wonder where peace, where hope can be found. We hear all around us cries for unity, but they fall hollow to the ground when they come in the same breath with demands for war and retribution. We want someone to blame, because we are much better at fixing blame than we are at fixing problems; we've been doing it ever since Adam blamed God for giving him Eve, blamed Eve for giving him the forbidden fruit, and Eve blamed the serpent for tricking her. We would unite against whoever it is that is responsible, to put an end to this madness, but no one can agree with anyone else on who "they" are; we just know that "they" aren't "us". We are also too practiced in creating division, in marking out who is "us" and who is "them", who is worthy of our love, and who is not, who deserves justice now, who will just have to wait, and who brought the injustice upon themselves so we don't have to do anything about it. Humanity has forgotten what is good and right in the eyes of God, and no longer sees the point in seeking to know these things, and a world tearing itself apart at the seams is the consequence; just as it was for Israel. But we hunger for a word of hope, a word that matters, when all around us is noise.

¹ Jeremiah 8:16 (NRSV)

² vs. 15

In the face of all this, I have been asked by the Session to speak a word of comfort and hope following the murders of Charlie Kirk, a man of faith, a man of family, an activist, and co-founder of Turning Point USA; of Minnesota state representative Melissa Hortman and her husband back in June; and state senator John Hoffman, who was shot nine times and his wife Yvette shot eight times earlier that same day (both of whom survived after multiple surgeries by the grace of God). Our country is bathed in violence with more than 2,800 murders in the US in the first six months of 2025 alone; most of whose names we will never know. When all we see around us is going to heck in a hand basket, we begin to doubt that we will ever see a time of peace, a time of healing, a time when we learn war no more,³ and we need assurance that there can be hope in this world.

I've struggled all week on how to talk about all of this without getting political. As all elders and deacons in this church have vowed before God and the church to do, I turned to the confessions of our church for guidance.⁴ There are two that speak to the hope we need in the face of the violence that plagues us and the division that keeps us from uniting against it. The first is the Theological Declaration of Barmen that was written in response to the takeover of the German Church by the fascist government of nazi Germany. That church knew a lot about violence and the false unity of forced loyalty; but with people I care about, people I have shared the body of Christ with, being in constant danger of being disappeared, I doubted my ability to hold back my anger and stick to the word of hope we all need to hear.

The second is the Confession of Belhar,⁵ which was written in response to apartheid, which “enforced racial separation by law and enforced through violence. Nonwhite citizens lived with constant and intrusive police presence and interference

³ Isaiah 2:4

⁴ W-4.0404 Constitutional Questions, Book of Order, 2025-2027

⁵ <https://pcusa.org/resource/belhar-confession>

in the daily functions of life. Those who protested risked punishment, imprisonment, and even death.”⁶ If they could find hope, with so much awful brought down upon them, perhaps we could find in their confession if hope can be found in our world today.

It begins: “We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.” If we remember this, if we step out in courage because of this, the hope we have in God alone can be made manifest in this world that is in so desperate need of it. (I question the wisdom of entrusting us with this task, but being engaged in this work should be as much a part of our daily lives as breathing.) “We [also] believe in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.” The church is holy because it has been set aside for sacred use, it is universal in that it includes people from all times and all nations, everyone. It doesn’t matter who they are. It doesn’t matter if they are tall or short, black or white, old or young, skinny or not so skinny, have a full head of hair or can’t remember where the last one went, or any other ways we divide ourselves. Everyone means everyone, and in that there is hope.

The confession goes on to state a number of things that we believe. “We believe that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another; [we believe] that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain; [and we believe] that this unity

⁶ From the Book of Confessions, 2016, PC(USA)

must become visible [in us] so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted;” And because we believe these things, we know that we must guard our unity as a community of believers against all that constantly threatens to tear it apart, not by eliminating the threat, but by doing the hard work of reconciliation, even when it seems impossible. And if we do this, every day, we will show everyone that there can be hope in this world.

“[We believe] that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways, [especially] in that we love one another.” I know that I have defined what this means before. I spoke on it a couple weeks ago because someone asked me to—she has a particularly awful neighbor, who she just couldn’t feel love for. I’m still not clear if I’ve gotten through that the kind of love God is talking about is not an emotion, it’s an action. So let me be forthright, let me allow a little salt to seep into this sermon: when we are commanded to love our neighbor, we are commanded to give a damn about them, even when they are nothing like us, even when their hardships have nothing to do with us. If we do this, every day, even when we can’t stand them, we will show everyone that there can be hope in this world, and division will end.

We, as the Church, the body of Christ, believe that we must “experience, practice and pursue community with one another, that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another”. This is what a life of faith looks like, which I have been talking about since we began the numbered Sundays after Pentecost back in the middle of June. If we do this, every day of our lives, there will be hope in this world through us. We can do this because “we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God

and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope;” And when we live like we believe this, every day, we will be strengthened and encouraged to step boldly forth in faith, and we will show everyone that there can be hope in this world.

Together we can “come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together [be] built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity” in which there can be hope; together as we seek to “know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity.” If we do this, every day, then the hope we have in Christ will be made manifest in the world around us, and violence and hatred will end. That is one of the reasons Paul told Timothy to begin ordering the life of the church in Ephesus with prayer, for everyone, even those who persecuted them and threatened their peace. Everyone means everyone. But be warned, prayer is a dangerous thing. As St. John Chrysostom, a 4th-century archbishop of Constantinople, is attributed to have said; “You can't hate someone you pray for” — at least not for very long.⁷

We further believe “that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people; that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged, that God calls the church to follow him in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; that God frees the prisoner and

⁷ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/230606.htm#:~:text=The Priest is the common,What is first of all?>

restores sight to the blind; that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly; that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering; that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right.” These are the things that are on the heart of God. These are the things that God cares about. And because of this, “the church *must* therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” This is why I have been talking about these things, because when we keep in our hearts the people and things that are in God’s heart, when we give a damn about what God gives a damn about, when we make this part of the everyday life of the Old White church, there will be hope, not just inside these walls, but also in the community that God has entrusted us with.

If the hope we have in God is to be made manifest in the world, in this community, in the daily lives of the Old White Church, it is up to us to make it happen. These are the things that must guide the daily lives of all who call on the name of Jesus Christ. These are the things I said I would talk about back in June: what the life of faith, a life in Christ, looks like, what it is guided by and focused on, and the rewards that may be found in seeking this life, even when the world around us has long since abandoned it. I’m sorry if I haven’t been able to make that clear, but I am convinced that if we can do this, there will be hope, and *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding*, will be made manifest in this world.⁸ May it be so, even with us. This is my prayer, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen!

⁸ See Philippians 4:7