

## A Reason for Hope

Romans 15:04f

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I know this is a very personal question and you probably will just want to answer it very quietly in your own heart, so I understand that. Have you ever thought of committing suicide? Have you ever thought of committing suicide? It would probably surprise all of us here how many of us would say yes. And more and more teenagers are committing suicide; the greatest cause of death now among teenagers is not drugs or road accidents, it's suicide. Just the week before last another Minneapolis boy in the north of the city committed suicide.

So, in a way it's not a startling question. More and more of us think in those terms today than ever in the days of our grandparents or our parents. And it does seem almost as if young people can sense more vividly or meet more logically the increasing hopelessness, that mankind generally has about avoiding the destruction of himself as a race. So, in a strange way, it is as if the children are expressing more plainly or with less sophistication, something that many of us are increasingly feeling in our day.

The sheer hopelessness of life was first mentioned by agnostic philosophers maybe 30 or even 40 years ago. Men like Bertrand Russell, and Mano the French philosopher. I remember well one broadcast where Mano was talking about the increasing hopelessness that there was generally in the world about changing the way our heredity and environment dominates our lives and at the very end of the broadcast somebody asked him, then have we no hope? And he replied, Well, if there is no hope, we have no hope" and of course it usually takes 20 or 30 years for the views of the poets and the philosophers and their insights to begin to govern the lives of ordinary people like ourselves.

And so it is just 20 or 30 years now. Some of you might remember about two years ago in the time of prayer requests, I asked for prayer requests and I read a letter from I think it was a man in Africa, a student from Africa who was at the university. If you were there you remember he outlines some difficult personal situations he was in and then he said, "Will you pray for me because I have no good hopes, I have no good hopes", and it seems that more of us in our day are facing that. Our life just doesn't seem to have any good hopes. And if you say "Why is that?" I think there are a thousand reasons but I think generally, we feel that we just may not be able to make this world work. I think that feeling is increasing that we just may not be able to make this thing work. We may not be able to make it stick together long enough. The terrorism and the thought of all the weapons that are in the hands of men like Gaddafi now, make us increasingly doubtful about our ability to hold the whole thing together much longer. In other words we wonder if we can live peaceably.

And that's never been the case before, really. I mean our grandparents and our parents always had some hopes of building the kingdom here on earth, they did. They lived in the days when the population of the world was about a billion or two maybe. And they had still hopes that we would be able to create the kingdom of heaven here on earth and we dreamed of the League of Nations and we dreamed of the United Nations and so we gave ourselves to that and we tried to make it real. Whether we made it real or not we at least had some hope that it might become real. Now I don't know that we feel that way any longer. I don't know that we feel we can make it real any longer, I don't know that we feel we can build a kingdom here on earth. We have four billion of us now in the world. A

billion of us probably live at subsistence level, two billion live at starvation level and the other billion of us here can't keep our young people from killing themselves.

And the more you look at the wider world, the more you begin to lose that hope that keeps you going and that keeps you trying and if you say, why did the teenagers kill themselves, well I think for one thing they don't see too much point in life. They don't see much reason for living, I think that's one thing. I think another is the futility that they see when they look at our grown up world. I think they don't see much point in life because the whole welfare system and educational system and psychological system has removed the fears that things like the Great Depression brought. So it's no longer as much a struggle for survival as it used to be just to get enough food and shelter and clothing to keep yourself alive, so that kind of distraction has gone. You don't have to struggle to make those things true and so it's increasingly difficult for them to see exactly the point of being here at all.

I think the other fact is true that they look at us adults and they see us drowning in pornographic muck and in television violence and throwing up our hands in horror when our neighbor is raped. And teenagers and anybody with any commonsense will just say, you guys don't actually want to improve this thing, otherwise you would change it. As well as that, I've tried to write it down, loved one's -- because it seems so difficult to put it exactly but it seems that underlying all that hopelessness that they have is the kind of short-sighted myopic preoccupation we have with our world here, inside a kind of closed universe.

It seems the more successfully we have made life comfortable on this earth, the more obvious it has become that this doesn't satisfy, so it's a kind of paradox. The more comfortable we've been able to make ourselves here the more obvious it has become to all of us as a race that that comfort doesn't satisfy. And as well as that, the more comfortable we have made life on the earth the less we have wanted or been able to sense any cosmic reason for life outside having a happy time while we're here. So, it's kind of worked against itself. We've managed somehow to make life more comfortable here for ourselves but the more we've done that, the more we've seen that that's not what satisfies -- and yet the more we've done that the less we can hold on to any cosmic reason for living, outside just being happy here or being comfortable here.

So, it's kind of got us into a blind alley and it seems for some reason or other our little teenagers can kind of perceive that more clearly than we have who have maybe all agreed to play the game a little longer -- because what do you do when you stop playing the game? Then you have to face the same thing as them. Why do they feel that that's not enough? Why do they feel it's not enough to be comfortable in this world? Because some of you probably here today even saw the Depression and certainly a number of us have seen wars, and a number of us dreamed of the day when there would be no depression, no wars and then we'd all be happy and it must bewilder us -- well now, why aren't they happy, why aren't they happy? They have cars, motorbikes; they have everything, everything you could want. It's hard to fail in America if you are a certain kind of person anyway. Now, why are they not satisfied? Well loved ones, it's in that same book. It's Ecclesiastes 3:11. It's a great statement. "He" -- God the creator -- "has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to end." "Also he has put eternity into man's mind."

That's why we take the mind expanding drugs, where you think I can jump off a sky-scraper and not be hurt. It's because there is eternity in all our minds. There is a feeling that we're made for eternity, there is a feeling that we are made for infinity, there is a feeling that we are made to

spread our wings and soar into the sky. And what we do with the mind expanding drugs is, we try to bring that about and it's because of that sense of eternity inside us that we are not satisfied with the sense of significance and the security and the happiness that we have managed to get for ourselves here on the earth. It's because of that that we are not satisfied with it. And the incredible thing is that the more we've been able to achieve those purely temporal transient ends, the sooner we'd been able to see that they don't satisfy, that there's no point in them.

So, without being too cynical, if you can have 10 people struggling, struggling, struggling just to get the food to live, it will kind of keep them saying, whenever they get the food to live and get a few other things they need, then they want to know "But why are we here?" And that's when a teenager begins to wonder, "Yeah, why are we here? I don't see too much point in it." What do you do? First be real, be real about your own life. Be real about your future here on earth, especially those of you who are in your twenties maybe or in your thirties and are looking forward to the future. First of all be real about that. Be real about the future; be real about what you can get out of it.

In other words, see the advantages that you have of being free of the counterfeit goals and objectives like get enough food, get enough shelter, get enough clothing which actually just keeps you distracted from the main business of living. Actually one of the advantages you have of being free of those is, you can actually step back and say, now what is my future going to be like. I'd like to tell you what your future is going to be like. It's Ecclesiastes 2:9 through 11 and it is important loved ones that you are just real about this.

"So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I'd spent in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun." That's it. I know you want to say, "No, no it isn't, it isn't -- otherwise I'll shoot myself."

But there's another reason for not shooting yourself, so stay. But that is it, that's it. You might get a good job that satisfies you most of your life, you might have a terrible job that you hate and you have to do all your life to keep yourself. From the point of your personal satisfaction, it doesn't matter too much. I know we think it does, I know we do. I was a school teacher and I did the same thing as you. It was vital to get something that would fulfill me. I must be fulfilled. Most of us spend a lot of our life not being terribly fulfilled. And actually at the end of our life it didn't matter too much and I know that sounds strange to you.

You might marry the girl of your dreams; you might marry somebody that is just terrible. The strange thing is it won't make too much difference over the years. The same self-discipline is required in marriages, the same restraint, the same willpower, the same forgetfulness of self, it doesn't matter too much. You might earn good money and make great investments; you might earn very little money and have no investments. The interesting thing is, it won't make too much difference to you, it really won't. In terms of your own personal happiness and personal satisfaction it won't make too much difference whether you are sitting down in Fort Lauderdale with a \$300,000 motor cruiser sitting there which only goes out once every three months when the little guy who has to look after it takes it out to see if the engine hasn't rusted out. And you are sitting there in your condo or whether you are sitting up here in a little cabin that you have built in northern Minnesota.

It actually won't make too much difference. I know that's a horrible fact of life but it is a fact

of life, loved ones. You might have a great wonderful career where everybody knows you and you have all kinds of adulation and praise and popularity -- or you might just brush floors and nobody knows you at all. You losing things, it won't make too much difference, as far as your own personal happiness and satisfaction is concerned, it won't. You might die with all kinds of people around you, all kinds of grandchildren and children and everybody there to make you feel you are not dying, everybody there; you might die in that situation. Or you might die absolutely alone with everybody that belongs to you dead long before you and you alone; nobody seems to know you've died.

It actually won't make too much difference. It's important to see that. I'm glad to be able to share that now because I have so often been so young that I couldn't estimate it or evaluate it too well. And I didn't know when the older people were right and when they were wrong and I was caught up myself as we all are with all these great goals and objectives we have and with all these feelings of the great difference it will make to our life if we can only do this. The fact is your life doesn't vary too much. It doesn't vary too much according to all those things. It really doesn't matter very, very much.

On the whole, what kind of job you get or what kind of money you make or who your friends are or how many marriages you have successfully made or how many families you have, it doesn't matter too much. It doesn't matter. Those temporal things are not what makes life, because at the end, we all kind of come the same road and we all end up in the same place.

Then what's the point of life? Is there any reason for living? Is there any hope for us? Of course there is, of course. I'll show you that verse that we've studied for several weeks, it's Romans 15:4. "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope." "By the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope."

Our God is a God of steadfastness and a God of encouragement. Look at the little babies he makes, look at the little puppy dogs he makes, look at the sunrises he makes, look at the ski slopes he makes, look at the wonderful rivers and the breakers and Hawaii that he makes. God is a happy God. He and Jesus are unalterably happy and they are always living in hope and they have created for you and me a real hope but it isn't to get this job, or get these investments, or get this marriage, or that. It's seventy years, 70 years is pretty small in the light of eternity, 70 years isn't a big deal, it just isn't a big deal. The things that we make a big deal aren't a big deal. God's hope is bigger than that.

Here it is. It's Romans 8:28. And it explains all the things that happen in your life and why they happen. "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren."

That's it. That's why you are here. You are here to receive day by day, different parts of Jesus, God's Son that God has created specially for you, just for you. There is a bit of Jesus that is made only for you, not made for me, not made for somebody over there, just made for you. To receive parts of Jesus day by day into yourself, to deliver you from your own selfishness and self-centeredness and to make you fit and right to live forever with God in a magnificent infinite world of such space that you cannot imagine it. Where there is a whole life of activity and a whole life of achievement waiting for us. That's why you are here, that's why you are here. That's the hope.

All these other hopes are transient things. The money, the job, the wife, the husband, all those things are transient things. The real reason you're here on earth is to receive different parts of Jesus, God's Son into you. So that you yourself will be able to take full part in the new world that he has ready for us. "This world is not our home, we're just a passing through, this world is not the end, it's just a vale of soul making that's what's happening to you." That's what's happening to you, that's why you live, that's why you live.

Don't think of committing suicide. No, this thing is not the perfect arrangement, this thing is not the perfect world, don't get all despairing. God has already despaired before you have, that's why he put it all into Jesus and destroyed the whole thing, so he knows the limitations of this fallen world. Don't mistake this fallen world as the real world that God has for us, no not for a minute. Sure I agree with you. If this is it, boy, lets all commit suicide because it's pretty miserable. But this isn't it; this is the place that God is using to make you like himself, for the world that will have infinite possibilities for each of us.

So loved ones I don't know how you answered the question. I'd say yeah, I have thought of it. I think most of us thought of it. Anybody who is sane at all and looks at this crazy world of ours has to sooner or later think of suicide. I know most of us have thought of it, but there's no point in suicide. Suicide simply enables Satan to destroy utterly and absolutely the potential that God has created in you and that he wants to bring out of you during this time. A moment after you die it won't matter whether you owned IBM stock or whether you owned Control Data stock. It won't matter too much whether you actually married Jean or married Joan, it won't matter too much whether you had five children or three children, it won't matter too much whether you've great investments or bad investments.

But what will matter is how like Jesus Christ you have become, because that will determine whether you are at home in heaven, or whether heaven is hell for you. So that will exclude ourselves, God won't need to exclude us, we'll exclude ourselves. So loved ones I encourage you, yes there's plenty of hope but it's the hope that we will become like Jesus day by day, become more like him so that we will be at home in heaven, and that's why we are here. I hope that those of you who are looking out at your futures will look at it realistically and see it in that light and that'll enable you to hit a lot of the bumps on the road a lot easier, and with a lot less crisis and fretting and anxiety. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we do thank you for making it plain to us that the things that we think are so important aren't important at all, as the years pass. But what is important is that we day by day receive some new part of Jesus that you put in him just for us and we allow some part of ourselves which you destroyed in him to be removed from us so that we do become conformed to the image of your Son, so that he is the first born among many brethren. So that he is the head of a great family of people, who can get on with each other in love and kindness and unselfishness and who can begin to take part in the full development of this magnificent universe that you've created.

So, Father we thank you for that, we thank you Lord it's not so much the things that happened to us that count as the way we respond to them. We thank you Lord that you are watching our response day by day and you are drawing us on into other experiences that will make us more like yourself. Now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore. Amen.