

Column

Deadly shootings, a recent one at a church potluck, coupled with political discord, economic turmoil and war abroad have brought about a famine in the land. Not so much a lack of food (though of late there are many empty shelves in supermarkets), but of hope.

Hope is a commodity of inestimable value and one vital to human flourishing. It is essential to business, commercial and civic life. It is what propels the farmer to sow his seed in the spring and what makes an individual get up in the morning.

Hope is what makes the world turn.

Oil comes from deep in the earth, grain from the field, wine from grape vines, but what about hope? Where can this precious commodity be found? Ultimately, the answer would have to be God. The Apostle Paul in Romans 15:13 speaks of “the God of all hope.”

The psalmist says something similar in Psalm 46 when he writes: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” The problem is that we humans often seek our refuge and strength somewhere else. In this country in particular, despite the words on our money, we trust not in God but in such things as our great military might, our scientific and technological prowess, and our economic superiority.

As important as these things are, they can never deliver the hope we so desperately require. Our hope must be in God. We witness to this hope by action and witness.

Action for some may come in the form of getting more involved in the political process. We have an advantage over those in New Testament times. We can vote. Good men and women standing together and going to the polls can send

packing those spoken of in Ezekiel 34:2 who have fed themselves and not the 'sheep' (the Lord's people). These surely would include those responsible for inflicting economic misery and thereby oppressing the poor and the working man and woman. Let there be no mistake: inflating the money supply is thievery and an offense against God.

No doubt there are many other avenues of practical, on-the-ground action open to God's people, but 'activism' alone is not enough. There must also be witness.

A story from the 19th century makes the point. John Richard Green, as a young enthusiastic clergyman, went to the slums of East London and set about to clean-up the vice and alleviate the misery he found there. He fed people, set up libraries, taught classes, cleaned the streets, but the cycle of degradation and hopelessness continued. Tired and disheartened, he returned to Oxford and wrote a history of England.

No long after there came another man into the same area of London. His name was William Booth. In addition to doing many of the things Green did, he preached the cross of Christ. Men's hearts were changed, and so was the East End. Drunkards were made sober; gamblers honest men; broken homes remade. Booth and his wife Catherine are remembered today as the founders of the Salvation Army.

Social activism without Gospel witness is of limited worth. The cross of Christ and the empty tomb are what bring ultimate and lasting hope.

Such a time as this brings not only challenges, but opportunities for action and witness. Look for them. Resolve to be a part of the hope team.

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom thou hast given an hearty desire to pray, may, by thy mighty aid, be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the Third Sunday after Trinity, Book of Common Prayer)

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