

acted when he recognized it. We are doing a big and bold thing here with our campaign, just as we are doing bold things in ministry every day. We are doing it with hope and we are doing it all together. And whatever the outcome is, I am certain it will be enough. It will be enough to meet our needs, to serve our neighbors, and to love our community. It will be enough because God has already given us more than enough in forgiving our sins, calling us to get up and serve, and pouring out love for us and the whole world.

All glory and honor, thanks and praise be to God.



First Presbyterian Church
of Royal Oak

November 9, 2025

22nd Sunday after Pentecost

"Hope is Enough"

Rev. Emma Nickel

Scripture: Luke 5:17-26

This passage in Luke is a story of friendship and healing. It's a story of forgiveness and Jesus' power. And it is also an amazing story about hope. At the start, we meet this group of friends. In my mind, they are young, industrious men. And one of their friends is paralyzed. Maybe he had lived that way for a long time due to a problem at birth or a health condition. Or maybe more recently he had had an accident and lost his ability to walk. Perhaps he and his friends had been horsing around late at night, egging each other on to jump from the highest ledge or take some other daring but stupid risk. And he landed wrong, twisting his spinal cord, severing his nerves. Can you imagine how stunned and anguished his friends would have been, desperate to try to help him? Can you imagine the guilt these friends would be living with? But also, their loyalty to the buddy who was now dependent on them. Who now likely wouldn't be able to marry or support his family or work at all.

Those were the friends that refused to give up on him. Those were the friends who said, "no matter what happens, man, we're here for you." Those were the friends who heard about Jesus teaching in their village. Like all the religious teachers who had come from far and wide, these guys had also heard about this rabbi who taught with power and even healed people. They wanted to bring their friend to him, too. But gathering his stretcher and getting everyone together took a while. By the time they arrived, the house was crowded and people were spilling onto the street. There was no way to get through the door to get to Jesus. But as we learned last week, hope is not simply a feeling. Hope is especially an action we take in the face of suffering or difficulty; it's something we do. And the hope those friends felt was enough to make them press ahead. They had no certainty what would happen if they got their friend to Jesus. But the possibility of goodness or healing or blessing was plenty to keep them moving forward.

- 1 Jeff Chu, "Pieces of Hope," June 5, 2025, Notes of a *Make Believe Farmer Substack* newsletter, https://jeffchu.substack.com/p/pieces-of-hope?utm_source=post-email-title&publication_id=24475&post_id=165290436&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=u7iek&triedRedirect=true
- 2 MaryAnn McKibben Dana, *Hope: A User's Manual* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2022), 106.

So these young guys climbed up on the roof. The scripture says there were roof tiles, so this was some kind of nice, Roman home, not just a peasant cottage with a thatched roof. These guys were so determined, they started removing the roof tiles, taking apart a whole section large enough to lower the friend's stretcher through. I would have loved to see the faces of the people in that crowded house as the roof above them moved, as daylight started to shine in as, and as this man on a stretcher was lowered through the ceiling. Jesus didn't seem to be bothered by this commotion though; he was not concerned about the destruction of property or this very strange thing that was happening. Jesus must have looked up to see the earnest and hopeful faces of the friends still on the roof, looking down at him. In their faces, he saw faith, hope, trust. He called the man 'friend.' And then, through his theological dialogue with the teachers below, Jesus both forgave the man's sins and allowed him to stand up and walk.

Hope was enough. Hope was enough to compel the friends to act. Hope, all tied up with faith, was enough to urge Jesus to heal this man in need, in his body and his spirit. As the friends were talking about going to see Jesus, as they gathered the stretcher, as they hatched the plot to claw through the roof, this plan still must have seemed like a long shot as a way to help their friend. Their hope was all they had, and it may have seemed like very little, indeed. But put together, and joined with Jesus' love, their hope was enough to make a transformation. Writer and preacher Jeff Chu says, "much like the fishes and loaves, hope does a miraculous thing in attentive, generous community. It replicates. Somehow, there's always enough to be shared."¹ The little community of friends shared their hope. Then Jesus shared it too. And together, that made all the difference.

Most of you have heard that this month we are holding our Building Hope capital campaign. Our congregation members and friends are making additional gifts to support renovations and restoration to keep our building inviting for people of varying abilities and a place for robust worship and ministry. We've been asked during the campaign, "what happens if we don't get enough funds? Which projects will we *not* do?" It's a reasonable question. And I have answered it as honestly I can, talking about which projects are the biggest priorities for reasons of regulation and safety. But our campaign chair, Kevin Ball, answered it quite differently. He said, "we are going to get enough funds. We're going to be able to do all the projects." He has hope—in you, in us, in God. And your generosity is demonstrating that we are on our way to our financial goal. Hope without action will not

get us there. But hope and faith in our community, generosity on the part of everyone here, and trust in God are enough to help us meet our goal or maybe even a little more. Even when our hope doesn't seem like much, it is a powerful thing when we share it and when we act on it.

In the Jewish tradition at the Passover meal, families often sing a song called "Dayenu." Dayenu means "it would have been enough." The song lists, in turn, each of God's many kindnesses to the covenant people - freeing them from slavery, walking them across the sea, supplying their needs in the wilderness and so on. For each action, they sing, "if you had only done this one thing for us God, it would have been enough: dayenu." In our Christian understanding, God's many kindnesses extend to Christ—sending Jesus to be God with us; Jesus' ultimate love that resulted in his death; and his victory over death in the resurrection. Any little part of those things would have been miraculous, amazing; it would have been enough. But God's love is abundant and overflowing. God chooses to give us *all* those gifts.

In that crowded house with Jesus, it would have been enough for Jesus to say, "Your sins are forgiven," to the man. That's not because his paralysis was necessarily the result of sin. But just because he is an everyday sinner, like all of us. The teachers were stunned when Jesus said that though. It was the prerogative of God alone to forgive sins. Just to make sure they had no doubts about Jesus or God's power, he went a step further. Jesus also told the man, "stand up and walk." He healed his body and gave him back the power to move on his own again. That alone, would have been enough, too. But to see Jesus do both those things, the people were astonished; they knew that they had witnessed something incredible; something holy.

The friends, including the healed man, must have walked away from there buoyed by hope. And they must have held a new hope in their hearts for what Jesus was all about. Hope is not always a straight line to success though, or to whatever good outcome we are wishing for. We all know people who died too soon; tragedies that still took place even when we were filled with hope. Hope is never a sure thing. But hope is enough to get us through. As Maryann McKibben Dana says hope is an underdog.² In fact, hope exists because we live in a world where suffering and evil often seem to have the upper hand.

It was no sure thing when the friends tore the roof off the house to help their friend. But they boldly did it anyway. Their hope was enough to get them to Jesus. And because it was all tangled up with faith, Jesus