

**+ 1 Timothy 4:9-16 + We Have Put Our Hope in the Living God +
+ Preacher: Pr. Jeremiah Gumm + Our Savior Ev. Lutheran Church – Springville, NY +
+ Installation of Pastor Paul W. Jenkins + 10 September 2017**

Hope is a funny thing. It looks to the possible. I hope the weather stays warm a little longer before the snow flies. I hope my team wins the championship. I hope I pass this test. I hope I make it through this job interview. I hope I can retire before I'm physically unable to work. I hope our offer on the house goes through. I hope he gets better. I hope our situation improves. I hope. I hope.

Hope looks to the possible, but how hopeful you are depends on how much trust you put in the unknown or the unseen. How much do you trust weather forecasts? For those in Hurricane Irma's path right now on the Gulf coast of Florida, days ago that hurricane was supposed to travel up the Atlantic coast. How certain are you about the ability of your team to overcome the ability of the opposing team? How well do you know the material for the test that someone else wrote or how much does a company want the skills you have? How sure are you that a seller will accept your offer or that health or your situation will improve? How certain is your hope?

We like to use the term "hope" because we love to have hope, but rarely do we buy in completely to that hope. You hedge your bets so you don't fail too badly if things don't work out. There always seems to be a little, cynical voice in the back of your mind asking, "Are you sure this is going to work?" That little voice is called doubt, and doubt can ruin your hope.

...But today is not a day of doubting, but a day of hope. September 10, 2017 is the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Springville, NY. Today you welcome the first full-time pastor to accept a Divine Call to serve your congregation. That's a reason for hope!

This day is also a day of hope for you, Paul. You're not a rookie fresh out of the Seminary anymore, but the Lord has used your experiences in Appleton and Normal and before you graduated to prepare you for a new chapter in life and ministry here. It's an important day in your life too as you become the shepherd of this flock in this place at this time. That's a reason for hope!

...But, dear friends, are any of those reasons THE reason for hope today? Friends, the fact that you have a new pastor, who accepted Christ's Call through your congregation to serve you—will that still be your source for hope when growth takes time and patience or the budget runs in the red? Paul, the fact that you have life and ministry experience—will that still be your reason for hope when a family in BIC stops coming or when you have a difficult conversation with a straying family or when you see the need to guide God's people in a necessary new direction, but they're not so sure about it?

No, if you put your hope in your new pastor or in your experience, you're going to end up falling on your face. Pastor Jenkins is not the Savior of the world—and he would be the first to tell you that, and pastoral experience only goes so far. So what will be your reason for hope after today?

The Apostle Paul wants to join our conversation on hope this evening—and it's worth listening to what he has to say as God speaks to us about hope through him. In fact, the Apostle has for pastor and flock a different kind of hope, a hope that is rock-solid and everlasting, a hope that impacts how you live and serve. ***"We have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe."***

The Apostle was writing to young Pastor Timothy, who was in Ephesus. God's people there had become a rather disorganized group in need of leadership. Some false teachers had made inroads among the people. So Paul sent Timothy to get things reorganized, to train and appoint overseers, and to confront the false teachers. Timothy was young and a little on the timid side, but as Paul gave Timothy this challenging assignment, Paul pointed that young pastor to the very basis of the Christian faith.

"This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe."

As Timothy went to Ephesus, he didn't know how reorganizing the congregation would go or how people would react to his youth or his teaching. Yet Timothy went knowing that he followed a God unlike those false gods worshiped in Ephesus. Yes, that God had died, but he had come back to life again. Why? To save a world full of sinners like young Timothy and all his hearers, to bring them to faith in Christ. Timothy had every reason for hope!

Paul, as you begin serving at Our Savior, perhaps you also come with some uncertainty. How will things go here? How will the Lord bless your ministry here and how will you be challenged? Will it go the way you hope?

Will the expectations of God's people be realistic or too high? How will they react to you as their pastor? Thankfully, the Lord gives you the same rock-solid hope that he gave to young Timothy. ***"We have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe."***

With that hope in the living God, you start your ministry here depending not on yourself or on our culture or on a false or dead version of God. No, your hope is in the living God who died, but came back to life again to save a world full of sinners like you and me and all of us here, the God who lives to bring you and them to faith in him. That's real hope going into this!

With that hope in the living God, you ***"command and teach these things."*** That means your primary focus as pastor is to make known what God's Word has to say to God's people in this place. You teach them about that living God. You equip them to carry out works of service and to view themselves as important parts of the body of Christ. You make known to them their Savior, so they see every soul as a soul for whom Jesus died no matter who they are, what they look like, where they come from, or who their daddy is.

With that hope in the living God, you can ***"devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching."*** What's the best way for you to keep that rock-solid hope in your heart? Spend time with Jesus in his Word! Spend time with Jesus in your private devotions letting him feed and nourish your faith. Spend time with Jesus in Bible study with God's people, helping them to grow in wisdom and faith. Spend time with Jesus in worship and encourage God's people to be here so they too can be fed. God wants you to be concerned about his life-giving Word.

With that hope in the living God, you can use the unique gifts that our Savior-God has given you, while having the humility to remember that you were not called here to be their Savior. You were called to be their shepherd. You won't work miracles. In fact, you'll quickly realize that mission work in upstate NY is tough sledding even without the snow, but our God in his grace will bless his people and people out in the community who don't even know right now that they're going to meet Jesus through you and the efforts of his flock here.

With that hope in the living God, you can also ***"set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity."*** God wants you to be the wellspring of his Word to his people. Let that Word be on your heart and on your tongue as you get to know God's people. And recognize that as a pastor, God also gives you the opportunity to be an example, a model for your fellow believers young and old. When little ones come up to shake your hand and tell you, "Good morning, Jesus!", remember that they and all whom you serve see Jesus through you. How you conduct yourself, how you show Christ's love to others, especially the unlovable, how you trust in the Lord and in his promises when things seem dark and difficult, and how you remain self-controlled, all of these things have a huge impact on God's people. They care that their shepherd cares for them young and old—and cares for God's will.

That's why the Apostle encourages us to ***"watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."*** When I was a kid, my father would often tell my siblings and me, "Remember who you are." Paul, that's what the Apostle is saying to you here. Remember that you are a shepherd of God's flock, and that's why Satan is going to work very hard to ruin you. He wants you to give up. He wants to ruin your reputation, so it discredits the gospel. In fact, he wants to do more than that. He wants to drag you into the fires of hell, but you ***"have put your hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe."*** You can tell Satan to go back to hell as you pay attention to how you live and what you teach, as you remember that you are a beloved child of the living God and a frontline shepherd of his flock.

...But the Apostle isn't just talking to Pastor Jenkins this evening. Remember what the Apostle wrote to Timothy? ***"This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that WE have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe."*** He doesn't tell you to put your hope in your pastor or in your memories of the golden glory days of this congregation. He doesn't tell you to put your hope in your own abilities or in how well you think you can relate to your community or culture. No, he reminds us where OUR hope lies—in the God who lives, in the Savior who rescued us and brought each of us into his family by faith, in the God who gives us hope!

So how will that look in how you live and serve the Lord? When Pastor Jenkins invites and encourages you to spend time with Jesus in his Word, see that as an invitation to enjoy a feast with the King of kings. Use the unique gifts that God has given you—your time, your talents, and your treasures—in service to your Lord and to his people. Let how you live reflect the fact that you are beloved children of God, and pay close attention to the

true teaching of God's Word—not so you can throw it back at those who reject it, but to connect blood-bought souls with their life-giving Savior.

Live and serve with hope in the living God, even when life and ministry aren't easy. Devoting yourselves and your families and your congregation to the true teaching of God's Word isn't easy. There will be times when the budget is in the red or the congregation is struggling and Satan will try to whisper in your to give up. But when he does...and he will, remember you have hope in the living God, the Savior of all. The Lord has promised to work through his Word—and he will on the hearts of others and on yours too!

Dear friends, it's time to get this new chapter started. Though I have the name of a prophet, I can't tell you what this chapter holds, but there is one thing you can be certain of no matter the joys or the sorrows, the blessings or the challenges, one thing you can be certain of as pastor and flock as you live and serve our Lord together. ***"We have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe."*** May the living God, the Savior of us all, bless you richly and be with you always. Amen.