

“Hope That Does Not Disappoint”

Proverbs 8:1 – 4, 22 – 31, Romans 5:1-5 & John 16:12-15

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June 15, 2025

We are big Mariner’s fans in my family. My love of baseball is rooted in a late summer spent with my father-in law, in 2001. It was a big season for the mariners, and a very difficult year for this country. My husband and I and my two small children had just immigrated from Scotland, and we were living with my father-in-law as we got ourselves settled. We would sit with him every night as he watched the Mariners game. I would be processing this new culture, and the things good and hard, that life throws our way, while he patiently explained the rules of this quirky and beloved national game.

My interest in baseball was planted back then, but it lay dormant for many years as we raised our family, until some 20 years later in the late spring of 2021 when my now-grown son came home to stay for a while. Life had thrown him some curve balls, and he needed to reset his life. Baseball was starting up as we spent time together figuring stuff out. We watched, and he shared his love of pitching and some of the nuances and skills I had missed the first time around as I was learning the basics from my father-in-law. That summer baseball became the family’s game.

These days we follow pretty religiously as a whole family, watching together when we can, sharing a messenger chat where we report news and comment on all things baseball, and enjoying a trip to the ballpark when schedule and budget allows.

My son’s dad grew up in Renton, and he has been a quiet and constant Mariner’s fan since childhood. He is the center of a kind of ritual that we wait for every new season. When the Mariners meet their first loss of the season, or even honestly just their first big mistake, he will lift his hands, shrug a little bit, and remark resignedly: “Well... there is always next year.”

We noticed this reaction a couple years back; a fumble, a missed opportunity: “Well, there is always next year,” he’d say. He is joking and we all laugh and wave him off, but there is this level of seriousness. He is telling us, I have been disappointed by this team too many times, this team that seems to get so close, but never quite makes it. So, I’ll resign myself to the loss now as soon as I see a hint that they are not up to it. There is always next year. It might just save me some pain and a lot of emotional investment.

There is a phrase that British people use to explain this tendency we have of guarding ourselves against disappointment. It originates in football - oops there I go again – I mean soccer, but it seeps into our life together as a people.

Maybe some of you have seen the TV show Ted Lasso. It's a show about an American football coach (actual American football) who goes to coach a premier league soccer team in London England. As he works to learn the game and to get to know the community in which he is coaching, he gets to see up close the fervor and the seriousness with which the locals take their football.

As the team faces the possibility of disappointment at the end of the season, and as Ted and others are wrestling with some of the very hard things life throws our way, the local bartender – a matriarch in the community - says this phrase to him, “ah Ted” she says, “it's the hope that kills you.”

It's kind of a brutal phrase, isn't it? It's the hope that kills you. But as I was watching the show, I recognized it right away. It's a thing British people say sometimes and it's a way I see us living out back home and over here too. What if you better guard yourself against the disappointment that is sure to come. You better guard yourself against it by criticizing any wrong move, by demanding better, and above all, resisting the temptation to give yourself over too far because there will be disappointment. We have experienced it before, and it will be there again. So be careful with that hope you have placed in this fickle game, in this life that can get difficult sometimes. Be careful with that hope. It will cause you much pain.

Beloved, life will disappoint in ways much harder to hold than a game of football or baseball. We experience such hardships and setbacks, and loss. We witness such pain and cruelty around us. We do things we regret. These very real experiences can convince us we need to protect ourselves by holding back, by getting cynical, and by becoming judgmental and jaded. We tell ourselves that to hope is naive, and it will only open us up to all sorts of pain.

But beloved it is simply not true. There is hope that can hold us – we might just be looking in the wrong places. As you know, I have been hanging out at Osceola Country Gardens. I was out there one week with Cathy Matson and Cathy Stanfield, and I told them that undoubtedly, I was going to end up using something I learned

there in that garden in a sermon or two. God teaches so much in a garden. So, here we go - here is the first but undoubtedly not the last lesson from the garden.

Cathy Matson has been trying to teach us new gardeners how to water. We have picked up somewhere that you must water as soon as you plant your seeds. Cathy has tried to tell us there is already water beneath the soil. She has shown us pictures of the field underwater for months this year. It's there and you need to let the roots find it. But if you must water, she says, water deep. Do not sprinkle once or twice a week. Sprinkling a bit of water on top will encourage the roots to remain thin. They will find water on top and stay there never getting grounded and digging in to allow for good growth. If you are going to water, let it soak deep. Water deep, she says. That way the roots will be encouraged to follow it down and get strong and deep.

Beloved, God has been watering deep. Proverbs tells us that God has been pouring the Spirit on us since the beginning of creation. This spirit that delights in us has been dancing through creation, pouring its love on us since the beginning of time. We have roots that go way down. We are well established in the goodness of God.

Jesus came in this Spirit, and he watered deeply. He poured himself out fully, gave his whole self that we might know the fullness of God's love and promise for us. And then he promised these disciples, he promised us, that this Spirit would continue to guide and hold us as we had faith in him and continued in his way loving as he loved.

The apostle Paul knows this Spirit. He met it in the midst of hardship. He turned to it with faith, and it brought him hope. It turned him from cynicism and cruelty and called him forth to share this Spirit with others. Paul knows that this spirit is with us through all afflictions – through all the difficulties we witness and experience and even contribute to. He knows, as do so many who testify to us through our scriptures, that as we rely in faith through all these afflictions on the Spirit of God, the truth and love that Jesus showed us, we will see that we can endure all things. And he knows that this endurance will produce a character grounded in hope. Real hope. Hope that does not disappoint.

In that TV show, Ted Lasso's team is giving up all hope that they will reach their goal and avoid a season of losses. Ted lets them know that he really, really dislikes this

phrase he's heard – it's the hope that kills you. He prefers a question instead – that question, he tells them, is, "do you believe in miracles? They are inspired and they return to the field to fight for a final win. Things don't go well and their last game ends in bitter disappointment. But still, we see a miracle, an ordinary miracle that carries them through their disappointments on and off the pitch. Their losses can be born because of the community they have been building along the way. They have been learning how to care deeply for each other, they have forgiven when they needed to, they have stood up with strength and love to bullying and toxic ways of relating.

This show may not be an overt Jesus story, but this community has faced its afflictions by showing each other the type of love that Jesus taught, in this they have endured and built up a character individually and as a group in which they find peace and a hope that carries them beyond their disappointments.

So, friends, do not be afraid. In this life, in these current events that are so very difficult, do not be afraid. Do not get cynical or judgy or jaded. Do not lose faith or give up on the love and the hope of God that has been so lavishly poured out on you. Remember that your roots go deep and, and as you reach for others out of this deep love and this hope you have been given, God willing, we will know peace. Amen.