

Worship, 26 August 2017

As you enter into a spirit of worship, please consider the symbol of hope that you brought with you this morning. Consider its features: size, weight, shape, color, and texture. Why is this symbol meaningful to you?

Gathering Music: “Tuhan Tidak Tidur”

Call to Worship

Liturgist: We come together as the people of God.

Women: We gather to sing.

Men: We gather to pray.

Women: We gather to confess our sins.

Men: We gather to celebrate God’s mercy.

Liturgist: We come together as the people of God.

All: Let us give thanks and praise.

“Muliakan Tuhan Allah” (Indonesian hymn, *Kidung Jemmat*, 14)

Liturgist	Congregation (response)
Praise the God of Life and Wisdom	Praise the God of Life and Wisdom
Praise the God of Life and Wisdom	Praise the God of Life and Wisdom
Praise the God Who loves and guides us	Praise the God Who loves and guides us
In our joys and pain, forever near.	In our joys and pain, forever near.

Confession of Sin

Brothers and sisters in Christ, listen now to some headlines from this past week’s news:

- “Mother of slain Charlottesville protester says she’s received death threats”, *The Washington Post*, August 18th
- “Alaska’s Permafrost is Thawing”, *The New York Times*, August 23rd
- “Up to 3,900 more troops to be sent to Afghanistan”, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 23rd
- “Trump retweets image of him covering up Obama in ‘best eclipse ever’”, *Politico Magazine*, August 24th
- “Even with Affirmative Action, Blacks and Hispanics Are More Underrepresented at Top Colleges than 35 Years Ago”, *The New York Times*, August 24th
- “Can the president launch a nuclear strike on his own?”, *PBS Newshour*, August 24th

“O God, how we have wandered”, verses 1 & 2
(*New Century Hymnal*, 202; sung to the tune “O sacred head, now wounded)

1 O God, how we have wandered
and hidden from your face,
in foolishness have squandered
your legacy of grace.
But how, in exile dwelling,
we turn with fear and shame,
as distant but compelling,
you call us each by name.

2 And now at length discerning
the evil that we do,
by faith we are returning
with hope and trust in you.
In haste you come to meet us,
and home rejoicing bring,
in gladness there to greet us
with calf and robe and ring.

Reflecting on God’s Word

Psalm 131 (NRSV)

¹ O LORD, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.
² But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.
³ O Israel, hope in the LORD
from this time on and forevermore.

During my months in the US this year, I have NOT felt calmed and quieted; my soul has not been like a weaned child with its mother, but more like an unweaned child screaming and crying for justice and enough hope to struggle towards that light.

During a transit stop on our return to the US in late January of this year (2017), John and I were shocked to hear Donald Trump announce his policy to ban people of several predominantly Muslim countries from entering the US. Although Indonesia has the largest number of Muslims in the world and the influence of hardline Muslims is growing, that country was not on the list. I presume one reason for this omission is explained on the Trump International Hotel and Tower Bali website says: *Trump Hotels has exciting plans to open the collection’s first resort in Asia as Trump International Hotel and Tower Bali* (<https://www.trumphotels.com/bali>). During our next transit stop in Iceland, an African woman and her young son were standing ahead of me in the

emigration line. I witnessed her being interrogated by officials and then pulled out of the boarding line and escorted away, I've no idea to where, but it seemed clear to me that this was an effort to keep her and her son from entering the US.

Since our arrival in the US seven months ago, I have watched the social fabric of this country rip and tear as hate spills over into the streets. This country of my birth and of my citizenship continues to break and fracture, the wounds of the present piling up on top of wounds that never healed from the past; we live in spaces of guilt and pain and trauma. This confuses my commitments. In January, shortly after arriving in the US, I wrote an email to a pastor friend of mine: "John and I just landed in Boston yesterday afternoon and I find myself overwhelmed by sadness and anger—chainsaws are ripping down the forests of humanity. As a US citizen I feel my presence *here* in the coming years may be more strategic than anything I might be doing now in Indonesia." I have heard others at this conference express a similar sentiment, like this: "I am returning to my work overseas, but part of me wants to stay." And then, only about a week ago, I learned something tragic and truly devastating about my birth family that requires time and support to process. Both the social space that I inhabit and my closer family space churn with unrest.

It has been especially difficult this year for me to hold hope close to my heart in any sustained way. So the worship schedule with my name on it provided me an opportunity to reflect more intentionally on hope and my thirst for it. My reflection led me to realize something that has often bothered me about 1 Corinthians 13.12-13, but that I have never articulated clearly: *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.* These are poetic verses that I like, but that I now question in my dance with hopelessness: why do we need "a greatest" here? Yes, the world is in desperate need of faith, hope, and love, but what I feel the greatest need for right now is hope.

This morning I want to share two stories from Indonesia that have helped to quench my thirst for hope in recent months. At the same time, I am cautious here because I realize there can be cheap hope, just like cheap grace, and sometimes we are too quick to celebrate hope because that helps us to evade or ignore issues that demand to be addressed. Sometimes our celebration of the resurrection lets us forget the pain of Maundy Thursday, Mourning Friday, and we completely ignore that middle time of Saturday. What's happening then? So my desires for hope are also full of caveats and the recognition that hope is held in creative tension with experiences of despair.

My first story is based on the opening music you heard earlier: "*Tuhan Tidak Tidur*"—"God Doesn't Sleep".¹ It is estimated that more than 10 million people live in Indonesia's capital city of Jakarta, so the mayor of Jakarta holds a powerful position. A man named Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) became mayor of Jakarta when his predecessor was elected as Indonesia's President three years ago. Ahok was a very popular mayor with the majority of Jakarta's population because he continued the previous mayor's tradition of transparency, and refused to align himself with corrupt politicians and government officials. It is also important to note that Ahok is both Chinese and a Protestant—two minority groups in Indonesia. The Chinese in Indonesia have suffered a long history of discrimination and violence; and Christians comprise

¹ A music video of this song can be watched/heard on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ80Aow4HGI>.

only about 10% of Indonesia's population. There is some speculation about whether the old boy network in Indonesia sought to replace Ahok with someone they could successfully bribe, OR whether they were trying to send an indirect, yet threatening message to President Jokowi regarding the need to "play ball" with military and corporate powers. In any event, Ahok was wrongly accused of blasphemy, was found guilty, and in May of this year was sentenced to two years in prison. Ahok did not appeal the court's decision as he knew it had not been a fair trial, and he did not want to risk an even longer sentence. Following his detention and huge public outcries regarding it—there were candlelit vigils all over the country and even internationally following his sentencing—Ahok wrote an open letter from jail to his supporters that his wife then tearfully read in public. In his letter, Ahok quotes verses from both Psalms 131 and 138.

The hope for me in this story is the creative resistance by Christians who took direct quotes from Ahok's open letter and used them as lyrics for a song and music video that have gone viral among many Indonesians. Although packaged as a sweet and melodious tune, in sharp contrast to the edgy rap we heard in the documentary *13th*, this song too was written to protest a grave injustice. When I first heard it, I didn't follow the full meaning of the lyrics:

*Whatever reality I must accept,
even if difficult, I'll see it through . . .
Because God has power for humans' path.
And my faith says: "God doesn't sleep".
You care for my life perfectly
As long as I'm faithful, You, God, will finish it
for me, who places hope in You.*

The first few times I listened to this song, I missed Ahok's point about God finishing what he'd begun, but then realized that he was comforting his supporters by assuring them that God would not lose sight of the humanitarian and democratic reforms he'd initiated, but would use others to continue the work Ahok had begun. Our hope is that even if we are unable to see fruits from struggles for justice, we have assurance that justice will prevail—God stays awake to help complete desires for justice and peace.

My second story is about the fortitude, courage, and resilience of a handful of committed young women (there are also a few men in this group) called JPIT: Women's Network of Eastern Indonesia. Most of these young people are graduates of the seminary where John and I teach. The area of Indonesia where we live and work is one of the most cash and infrastructure poor provinces in the country. Especially in the many villages of our province, education is very poor and there are extremely high unemployment rates; many young people do not embrace subsistence farming as a viable future. This, combined with the aggressive approach of recruiters, has led thousands of young people to migrate from their home villages to more populated Indonesian islands and to Malaysia where they are often trapped in situations of indentured labor. In 2016, members of JPIT began counting; more than 50 young people who had been illegally recruited were returned to our province in coffins. This year, the count by late August of young men and women who have returned dead is almost 60, and tens of others have returned with horrifying accounts of the torture they've suffered, usually as workers in Malaysia.

The young men and women of JPIT who accompany these victims of TPPO: *tindakan pidana perdagangan orang* or victims of the criminal act of human trafficking, are learning about the complicated layers of human trafficking and through that process are developing skills of self-care, recognizing that their care of the JPIT community is an essential component of self-care. I am privileged to be a member of JPIT and am included on a JPIT WhatsApp group where all sorts of sharing takes place. I am continually impressed by the ways JPIT members support each other through this social media. They use WhatsApp to coordinate many logistics of their activism, but they also send each other jokes and also kind messages full of colorful, positive icons. Juliana Benu is now an active member of JPIT, but before she graduated from the theology school, she was one of the students I advised so that I came to know her well. About two weeks ago, Juliana posted a poem to the JPIT WhatsApp group that I would like to share with you:

Pencari Keadilan (Seekers of Justice)

Who says the sun's heat stings?
We seekers of justice continue to march.
Who says the sun's heat burns the skin?
We seekers of justice still have enthusiasm.

Who says walls of impunity are made of steel?
We seekers of justice continue to resist.
Who says walls of impunity cannot be torn down?
We seekers of justice will tear them down.

Who says that the struggle of seekers of justice is in vain?
We seekers of justice still have hope.
Who says the night is forever?
We seekers of justice say there is yet a sunrise.

Juliana Benu
14 Aug 2017

While I've been here in the US, I have been able to learn from and draw hope from Christians in Indonesia who are finding creative and artistic ways to respond to the contexts of prolonged injustice they experience.

Offerings of Hope

The evening before, participants were invited to bring a symbol of hope to the worship service. At this point they are invited to stand and make a brief statement of their symbol before placing it in the offering basket. (Valued items are returned after the service.) The method of mutual invitation was used to invite people to share.

Benediction

“O God, how we have wandered”, verse 3

3 O God of all the living,
both banished and restored,
compassionate, forgiving,
our peace and hope assured.
Grant now that our transgressing,
our faithlessness may cease.
Stretch out your hand in blessing,
in pardon, and in peace.

Go now to continue your journeys of faith, hope, and love; for these three do indeed abide; but none of these need be the greatest, because the greatest of these is all of them together.
And the people of God say:

Amen!