

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

MARCH 2009

OUR LIVING HOPE

BY DAVID BISGROVE

Several years ago a dinner guest who was exploring Christianity asked me what I liked best about my job as a pastor. The first thing that came to mind was that in some small way I have the opportunity to communicate hope to people in the midst of their doubt, uncertainty, fear and suffering. To remind people (and myself!) that the things promised in the Christian life (joy, contentment, peace) are possible not because Christians avoid suffering, or are naïve about the world, but because in the midst of things like global recessions and other trials, Christians have a resource the Apostle Peter calls a 'living hope' (I Peter 1:3) that is rooted in the life, death, resurrection and mission of Jesus.

This hope can be best under-

stood in contrast to the kind of alternative existence portrayed in Jean Paul Sartre's play titled "NO EXIT." The characters in the play are sentenced to spend eternity together without sleep or eyelids. They tell flattering (and untruthful) stories about their lives in an effort to rehabilitate and redeem their past. Yet despite their efforts the moral of the play is summarized by the line "You are your life, and nothing else," highlighting Sartre's point that *hell begins when hope disappears*.

Which brings me back to the answer I gave to my dinner guest. Hope is at the heart of the church's *message*, which is the good news that Jesus fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy that we have a "hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). And it is also at the heart of the church's

mission as we are called to communicate that hope to others.

Yet despite the centrality of this 'living hope' many Christians live with a kind of chronic anxiety about the future, or bitterness about the present. Why? The short answer is that instead of "putting our hope in God's unfailing love and full redemption" (Psalm 130:7) we often invest our hope for significance, security and contentment in things other than God.

For example, if someone invests their ultimate hope for *contentment* in romantic love and marriage (good things by the way!) but is unwillingly still single, the result is often deep bitterness and doubt of God's goodness. Or likewise if someone invests their ultimate hope for *acceptance* in their
(Continued on page 3)

EASTER SACRIFICIAL OFFERING FOR HFNY

Each Easter, Redeemer collects a special offering for Hope for New York, an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization. **100% of the offering** received is given in the form of direct grants to HFNY's affiliate organizations that serve the poor and marginalized throughout New York City.

We need your help this year more than ever. The current economic climate has caused a signif-

icant increase in the need for services for homeless and low-income individuals and families across our city. They are the most vulnerable, and the needs are becoming increasingly more urgent and essential. Due to these increased needs, HFNY will use this year's Easter Offering not only to issue regular grants, but also to distribute *emergency grants* to a) affiliates that serve basic needs such as providing food and shelter and

b) affiliates that are experiencing a critical financial shortfall due to an expected decline in donations.

Please prayerfully consider your sacrificial gift this Easter. This special collection will be made during all Easter Services. You may also make a donation online at www.hfny.org/donate. Or you can mail a donation, making checks payable to "Hope for New York", 1359 Broadway, Suite 410, New York, NY 10018.



GENEROSITY AS ART

BY HOWARD FREEMAN, SR. DIRECTOR, GENEROSITY

Credit card debt that is over due 60 days or more increased in January, 2009, to record levels according to a report by the CFA Institute. For many living in New York there was no need to read about this in an report—all they had to do was look in their mail. So, is now the time to talk about generosity? Absolutely. It's also an excellent time to discuss stewardship, but in actuality, generosity comes first.

As we survey the narrative arc of the Bible—Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration—let's start with our redemption. At the end of each sermon by Redeemer pastors we are reminded of who Jesus is and what he has accomplished in our behalf. Whether we are Christians or curious about Christianity, this is the central reality we must wrestle with time and again. When we read accounts in the Gospels, then, of Zaccheus (Cf. Luke 19) and the woman who anointed Jesus' feet (similar accounts in all four Gospels)¹, we find that an encounter with Jesus—the Living Gospel—can cause extreme generosity. (It doesn't always; we'll get to that in a minute.) This is scary. It is frightening to think that if I encounter Jesus on his terms, then I might find him to be such a treasure that my earthly wealth (such as it might be) is demoted to second place—or lower—and I find I want to bless others by giving as freely as Jesus has given to me.

It certainly scared away the

rich young man of Matthew 19. And Judas despised the woman's act of anointing Jesus, because he himself was a thief; as treasurer of Jesus' ministry, he stole from the checking account. They, too, encountered the gospel, but they found comfort instead in the known, the measurable. Therefore, we must encounter the Living Gospel each week—each day—to feed on our justification.

As we live out the gospel then, being generous with all we have and all we are, we can better understand stewardship. We learn that God, as Creator, is the Owner of everything, and we have a duty to manage the resources he has put us in charge of in a way that is in line with his priorities and not our own. Because of the Fall, and to avoid the idolatrous hold money can have, we need to give it away systematically and sacrificially, for our own good as well as the good of others.

As generous people who are also good stewards, we can be agents of restoration in New York. First, we can create a counter-culture of sharing and wise financial stewardship. As we actively love one another by living lives full of the fruit of generosity, those outside the church will recognize that we follow Christ (John 13:34-35). Likewise, as we give our treasures and talents (creating new businesses and non-profits, and practicing gospel-shaped habits in the workplace) to our communities, we restore the city.

American writer and the "voice" of *The New Yorker*, E.B. White, once wrote, "The city is like poetry: it compresses all life, all races and breeds, into a small island and adds music and the accompaniment of internal engines. The island of Manhattan is without a doubt the greatest human concentrate on earth, the poem whose magic is comprehensible to millions of permanent residents but whose full meaning will always remain elusive."

What will you do this month to add a verse?

Our 2009 budget of \$10.5 million is funded by you. To give money visit:

<https://giving.redeemer.com/>

We accept non-liquid assets. Email howard@redeemer.com

To give your time in prayer, get involved with The Well or contact our Prayer Team Leader: redeemer.com/connect/prayer/

To serve through mercy and justice visit:

<http://hfn.org/volunteer/>

To be considered for a role with our Diaconate contact Jenny Chang at (212) 808-4460 x1407 or jenny@redeemer.com

To learn how to budget or erase debt visit:

redeemer.com/learn/classes/class_schedule.html

REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller
Heather Klein

HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM
East 69TH (Between Park & Lexington)
services at 10:30AM • 6:00PM

ETHICAL CULTURE
West 64TH and CPW
service at 9:15AM

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
Corner of West 79TH and Broadway
service at 5:00PM & 7:15PM

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

OFFICE • 1359 BROADWAY (BETWEEN W. 36/37TH STREETS) • FOURTH FLOOR • NY, NY 10018-7102

(212) 808-4460 (PHONE) (212) 808-4465 (FAX) www.redeemer.com

HOPE FOR NEW YORK'S NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: ELISE CHONG

The Board of Hope for New York is pleased to announce that Elise Chong has been selected as Executive Director to lead the organization into its next chapter of service to our city. Elise emerged as the clear choice during a three month executive search process that culminated in the board's unanimous vote in January, 2009.

Her passion for Hope for New York's mission and vision tightly coupled to her skills and insights for nurturing all of the relationships that make HFNY effective emerged as the most compelling attributes in support of the selection. Elise previously served as HFNY's Associate Director and has been with the organization for over five years. Prior to

HFNY, she has worked at other nonprofits in New York including World Vision and Covenant House. Elise is a native of Massachusetts and has lived in New York City for over twenty years.

Please join the HFNY board, its staff, and the broader HFNY constituent community in congratulating Elise on her selection for this important leadership role.

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

During these tough economic times, remember the Diaconate is here to express the love and mercy of Christ in tangible ways. If you are a Redeemer member or a regular attendee and you have a practical need, please call the Diaconate Helpline. We will pray with you and partner with you to seek wise solutions to your particular situation. If you are aware of Redeemerites in need, you may want to encourage them to contact the Diaconate.

Diaconate Helpline: (212) 726-1334

OUR LIVING HOPE (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

talent as an artist, the exposure to other talented artists will often lead to insecurity and a competitive spirit. All because of a failure to invest our contentment and acceptance in God's love for us. So how do we activate this 'living hope'? Though not an exhaustive list, we at least have to remember our *new identity*; access our *new power*; and re-tell ourselves the *old story*.

New Identity

When Paul writes in Romans 8 about the frustration the world experiences due to sin, he writes that "we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons...for in this hope we were saved." Think of it this

way. The lives of my children will be shaped by many people, but their primary sense of who they are will ultimately be shaped by their relationship to my wife and me. No one has more power over a person's identity than their parents. So when Paul says that our hope is related to our adoption, he's calling us to remember that God is not some remote deity who is indifferent to our trials, but is a personal and nurturing Father who loves us so much that he sacrificed his only son so that we could be adopted into his family. Of course knowing in your head you are a child of God isn't enough. You have to experience it

in such a way that it fuels your hope during difficult times. Let me show you what I mean.

New Power

When I first moved to Manhattan, a homeless man died on the steps of a school in my neighborhood. This story was made more tragic by the fact that this man had money in the bank and family nearby, resources at his disposal that might have saved him. Similarly, often times Christians live spiritually tragic lives, having the *same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead* (Romans 8) living in them, yet seemingly unable to access that power. What's the

(Continued on page 3)



1359 BROADWAY
4TH FLOOR
NEW YORK, NY 10018

NON PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
US POSTAGE
PAID
NEW YORK NY
PERMIT # 349

OUR LIVING HOPE (CONT'D FROM PAGE 3)

solution? Regular use of the spiritual disciplines of worship, prayer and mediation.

And during times of extraordinary trials or uncertainty—which certainly describes what many are going through in this time of economic upheaval, those disciplines become even more critical. This argues for making use of the current season in which we find ourselves, Lent. Historically this is a time when Christians take stock of their spiritual health in anticipation of the celebration of Easter. It is a time of self-examination, repentance and self-denial (hence the idea of ‘giving up something for Lent’)—all of which are great ways to identify and repent of those things that

have taken root in our lives as a replacement for the hope we have in Christ. So take time, as an individual and as part of a community, to examine your life and access the power God has given us in his Spirit.

Old Story

Of course, there’s always the danger that spiritual introspection can make us more despondent, which is why repentance and self-denial must be done in light of retelling ourselves the ‘old story’ of Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection. Peter wrote that this living hope comes through “*the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*” (1 Peter 1:3). This reminds us that Christian hope is not a philosophy or a technique

but the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is the reason Christians believe that Sartre’s hopelessness doesn’t define reality; that injustice, greed, disease and death will not ultimately define us or the world. Death has been swallowed up in victory. When Jesus died, so did death’s power over us. And when he was resurrected, it infused the whole creation with a living hope. It is this old story of Jesus’ triumph that we must tell ourselves. And to the degree that we do, and find ourselves filled with hope, we will naturally want to tell the story to others. For only in the story of Jesus will we find what we ultimately seek—our living hope.