

Dear People of Hope,

Pastor Craig Groeshel, a speaker at a recent conference I attended, told us he had invented a new leadership word called “puc”.

Puc stands for pain, uncertainty, and chaos. It is the hard, stressful, garbage of life that drains our tanks and seems outside of our control. This last year we have been through a lot of puc. And it seems at times to be increasing in intensity. Our culture is divided, and many are frustrated and angry.

I have been reflecting on that. It is easy to get stuck in the puc. To be filled with anxiety, resentment, anger, and despair. I was there for a while and as I was praying the Holy Spirit gently reminded me of something incredibly important, perhaps the most important thing for us in this time as followers of Jesus Christ: Our faith begins in a place of pain, uncertainty, and chaos. Jesus on the cross suffered physically but also carried the pain of the sin of the world. His followers looked on with great fear and uncertainty as it seemed like evil had won the day.

Yet, for God, there was and is no uncertainty in the cross. Jesus took on the violence of our world, the pain of our grief, the chaos of the devil, and the penalty of sin so that we don't have to. God demonstrated with certainty and purpose His unending, grave shattering, lifegiving love for us.

And so, we stand in the puc. We live in the mess. But I want to be clear. We have a choice as to how we will respond. I don't have all the answers to know what is right or wrong in all the difficult choices we are facing as people. I do know that Jesus is with us. He stands in the puc with us and for us.

Not only that, but I also know the pain, uncertainty and chaos that we are experiencing is a tremendous opportunity for us to proclaim the good news of our Savior. We have been praying for revival, we have been praying those that do not know, to know, for the lost to be found, for the prodigal to come home. We have been praying that we as a church can grow deeper in our faith, that we can abide more securely in Christ, that we would grow in wisdom, stature, and love. We have been asking for opportunities to show the world how amazing is the love of our Savior. We have that opportunity! Perhaps, more than any other time in our lifetime, we can share boldly the love of Jesus Christ!

I know it to be true, that often the moment when we grow the most in our relationship with Jesus is when we are facing the most difficult times in our lives. Discipleship is not comfortable or easy. We are not meant to live a problem and pain free life. We are called to share with everyone the solution...Jesus.

Our faith begins at the foot of the cross, but it doesn't end there. It ends with an empty tomb. It ends with an Easter promise. It ends with all of creation being redeemed by the blood of the lamb. It ends with God bringing His children home and wiping every tear from every eye. I encourage you to read Revelation 21 and 22 to see what the ending is. We know the ending. God wins forever.

So...take courage. Don't get sucked down into the puc. Let Jesus change your view. Do not look at the world through the lens of poor me, or what am I losing, or this is so stressful. Instead, put on the eyeglasses of the cross, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and choose love.

When the world goes low, you go up. When people resort to arguing, name calling, and division, point them to compassion, grace and unity in Christ. When fear grips your soul, run to the cross. When the devil tempts you to be self-centered and angry, call on the name of Jesus! The evil one has no claim on

your life anymore! Don't focus on the scarcity of what you perceive you are losing, focus on the abundance of God's love in Jesus!

Philippians 3:20 reminds us that "our citizenship is in heaven." We don't belong to this world anymore. Hope is the definition of our lives. Our calling is to bring more people home.

A tremendous challenge and opportunity stand before us. What will you choose? To let your actions be defined by this world, or by the love of Jesus? Yes, it is hard. Yes, it is difficult. Jesus stands in the difficult with the Hope of the world! Will we stand with Him?

At Hope we will continue to provide many opportunities to help you and your family navigate your soul business during this challenging time. With Worship, Hopekids, Confirmation and more available both in-person and online to fit your family's needs, the decision to mask or not mask will be honored as a personal choice. All are welcome and encouraged to join us as we seek to encourage all people to know the love of Christ.

Peace in Christ,

Pastor Paul