

Good morning. A long time ago, when I was an undergraduate at the University of Colorado, I was majoring in history. But I wanted to be able to read the New Testament in Greek, so I took an introductory class in the Greek language. I did really well in that class, and somehow, I got the crazy idea that if I added one semester to my studies, I could double major in Greek. I talked with some friends about this, and they agreed I should give it a try. And so I did. With great excitement and confidence, I took my first upper division class in Herodotus, the Ancient Greek historian. I was going to double major in Greek.

As I walked into the first class I instantly knew something was wrong. All the students were older than me, and as I listened to their conversations, I realized that they were all graduate students, and half were working on their PhD's. **Uh oh.** When professor Kopf walked in he had the class start translating immediately, and all these graduate students did such a good job! When it was my turn, it was bad. Really bad. I could barely translate one sentence. I was shaken, and embarrassed. My dreams of majoring in Greek seemed silly. Up to this point I had been a good student. But now I felt like giving up.

Interestingly, as I was looking at our readings for this morning, I kept thinking about my first experiences with majoring in Greek. So I want to use my journey with Herodotus to look at how sometimes in life we feel overwhelmed and in over our head, but no matter what our situation, God always provides hope, and encouragement.

I hung in with Herodotus for a few weeks. Then came the first test. Let's just say I didn't do well. I got an F. A real F. A solid F. A 38% F. It was awful. So I went to Dr. Kopf's office after class, fully expecting him to tell me to drop the class. But he didn't. He admitted he was discouraged in my performance, but he knew I was a good student, and he didn't want me to give up. He assured me that he would not grade me the same way he graded the graduate students, and he would call on me first every class so I could prepare my translations. And if I showed improvement over the course of the semester, he would grade me on how I finished, not on how I started. It was clear that Dr. Kopf believed in me.

In our Old Testament reading this morning the Jews have returned to their home after the Babylonian captivity. This is a very happy time, but they are overwhelmed by the task of rebuilding. The prophet Haggai, in what for me

are some of the saddest words in the Bible, says, “does anyone here remember how glorious our home used to be? How does it look to you now.” But then Haggai encourages his people, telling them that God is with them, they will rebuild, and their glory will be greater than it was before. In bad times Haggai believed in his people, just like Dr. Kopf had believed in me.

We have all experienced times of failure and disappointment in our lives. There are times when we have all felt overwhelmed. We all know what it's like to have gotten in over our heads, where we wonder how we ever got where we are. Maybe we are struggling with an addiction, and we wonder, how did I ever end up here? Or maybe we are estranged from a family member, and the thought of trying to rebuild that relationship seems overwhelming and impossible. Or maybe trying to improve things at work seems hopeless. Or maybe we've been dealing with a medical issue for months, or even years, and we're worn out trying to figure out what to do next. There are seasons in our lives when we don't know how to rebuild, or even what to rebuild on.

But I believe in these discouraging times God always sends us an encouraging prophet like Haggai, or for me, a doctor Kopf. God is always telling us that He is with us, He believes in us, and we can rebuild. No matter how many F's we've gotten, God can make things better than they were before.

Dr. Kopf's encouragement was very important to me, and always translating first was incredibly helpful. But I still struggled. A lot. I was not sure I would pass the class. I told the teacher who taught me introductory Greek, Becky, about my struggles, and she very kindly offered to meet with me twice a week over lunch to work with me on my translations. That was so helpful! She encouraged me to focus on the tenses of the verbs, to sense the rhythm of the Greek and to anticipate the author's thought, and most of all to be patient. I was chomping at the bit to get better and improve my grade, but she encouraged me to patiently slug through the words and the grammar, and trust that over time my translation skills would improve. And they did. Very slowly, but surely, I started to get better. I would never have been able to improve without Becky's patient investment in me, and her encouraging me to be patient.

In our reading from Thessalonians, Paul is writing to a church that is very impatient. They are a church that loves Jesus, and they are eager for His return. Maybe a little too eager. They had heard rumors that he had already returned, and they were alarmed and confused. Did Jesus return and forget us? And as we will read next week, some in the Thessalonian church were so convinced that Jesus' return was imminent, that they stopped working. Why work when Jesus was coming back at any minute? They deeply longed for Jesus to return, but they just couldn't wait.

So how does Paul help the Thessalonians? He gives them some perspective. They want Jesus to come **now**, but Paul reminds them that certain things have to happen **first**. First, people will rebel against God. Then, the anti-Christ will be revealed, and then Jesus will come back. Paul tells the Thessalonians to take the long view, relax, and keep doing the day to day things they need to be doing. Between now, and then, be patient.

It sounds so easy, doesn't it? But being patient is very hard. Keeping perspective in life is hard. And doing the work of life while we wait for something to happen is sometimes extremely hard. Maybe we're undergoing medical tests to check out some symptoms, and the results won't be back for weeks. It can be agonizing to just keep doing the work of life while we wait to see what might be wrong. Or maybe we long to see a child or family member make better choices and turn their life in a different direction. But it is hard to patiently take the long view, and remember that a number of things must happen first, over a long period of time, before that person is living a better life. Or maybe in our own lives there is a habit, or character issue, that we really, really want to change, but we know that for that to happen we must patiently, over time, take all kinds of steps before we have found victory in that area.

In my Herodotus struggles, Becky helped me see that improving would take time. My grade wouldn't go up until I had done the nuts and bolts work of studying my grammar and vocabulary. Her perspective helped me to be patient. I believe the source of our patience in life is always found by trying to see God's perspective on a situation, and then taking the small steps, day by day, to help make it happen.

So with Dr. Kopf's encouragement, and Becky's help, I started to do better. It wasn't easy, and I was filled with anxiety during every class, but my grade started to go up. As the semester went on, however, the hardest

thing for me was not understanding the grammar, or doing the translations. The hardest part became dealing with the voice in my head that said “give up, it’s hopeless.” Even well into the semester, when things were going better, that voice often said, “drop the class. It’s too hard. There is no shame in admitting defeat. You literally gave it the old college try. You couldn’t do it. Drop the class, and move on.” After an especially difficult class, or after an especially difficult night trying to figure out my homework, that voice seemed pretty reasonable. Dropping the class, and forgetting about a second major in Greek, often seemed like the right and rational thing to do.

Jesus was familiar with the voice of hopelessness. In our Gospel this morning the voice of hopelessness was being articulated by the Sadducees. The Sadducees were a group in Jesus’ day who didn’t believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees were faithful Jews, but they believed that because this life is all there is, there is ultimately no hope. And they were trying to trap Jesus. Their question about the woman who married seven brothers, and who would she be married to in heaven, was really just a Jedi mind trick to say that hope is irrational. It’s absurd that the woman could be married to seven brothers. Therefore, there is no resurrection. And no hope.

But Jesus wasn’t buying it. He tells the Sadducees that hope operates on an entirely different level than who is married to whom in heaven. Hope and resurrection are bigger than this world. Hope is not irrational, it’s bigger than rational. For the Sadducees, hope and resurrection made no sense. But in heaven, hope and resurrection are everything. Hope and resurrection make sense of everything else.

In our secular and scientific culture, we all must battle the powerful voice of hopelessness. For me, it doesn’t help to ignore the voice, because then the voice just gets louder. I think the best strategy is to acknowledge the voice, but then move on to hope and resurrection. Yes, there are reasons we feel hopeless about our political problems. But we hang in there, because in Jesus there is hope and resurrection. Yes, perhaps there are reasons we feel hopeless about our work situation, but I’m going to hang in there, because in Jesus there is hope and resurrection. Yes, perhaps there are good reasons to think that my extended family will never be healed. But I’m going to hang in there, because in Jesus there is hope and resurrection. Yes, for sure my aging body will never be the same as my 20

year old body. But I'm going to hang in there, because in Jesus there is hope and resurrection. And hanging in there doesn't mean passively accepting everything. Hanging in there might mean decisively changing everything, because in Jesus there is hope and resurrection. When we are hopeless, nothing makes sense. But when we see things from the perspective of Jesus' resurrection, we begin to see glimmers of hope. The resurrected Jesus makes sense of everything else.

Though it was a real struggle, I'm happy to report that my Greek story ended well. With Dr. Kopf and Becky's help I continued to improve, I somehow got an A on the final exam, and I got an A in the class because I finished strong. And based on that success I went on to major in Greek. I learned a lot about encouragement, and patience, and faith from that experience. I hung in there, and I'm glad I did.

Today we honor our veterans, and I can think of no group that better personifies, and exemplifies, the principles I learned in my Herodotus class than veterans. In a much bigger way, and in a far more consequential way, our veterans had to deal with feelings of maybe not being up to the task set before them, of not knowing what the future would bring, and yet being impatient to bring it on, and of battling the voice of hopelessness that tempted them to quit, or despair of ever returning home. And I can think of no better way of honoring our veterans than by asking them for their wisdom. We all need help on our life journeys, and our veterans are especially qualified to help us by sharing with us what they learned, and how they lived. They are sacred guides, and I know they would love to share their stories with us.

As each of us navigate our own Herodotus seasons, may the God of encouragement and resurrection bless us richly, may he raise up good people to encourage us, may He provide us with hope, patience, and confidence, and as we build and rebuild, may he guide us into His peace which passes all understanding. Amen.