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A Hope That Lasts

By The Rev. Rachel Rickenbaker

We are a people who seek hope. When we find ourselves divided or in difficult times, it becomes quite easy to place our hope in earthly leaders, plans, and ideas for solving our troubles. The problem is that when we place our full hope in earthly things, in people and in policies, we will eventually be disappointed. When we look to earthly people and policies as our savior, we will always be left empty and searching.

I recently read the novel, *Becoming Mrs. Lewis*, which is historical fiction and an account of the relationship between Clive Staples "C.S." Lewis, an influential writer and lay theologian, and Joy Davidman, an American poet and writer. The story is told from Joy's perspective, using excerpts from her letters and writings. It is refreshing because we often hear so much from C.S. Lewis – someone I deeply appreciate and admire – but we don't hear as much from Joy, one of his greatest influencers in life.

Throughout her life, Joy had every reason to despair. She was brilliant in her writing and in her observations. Yet, she faced great difficulty in a world that

valued the voices of men, and often overlooked the talents of brilliant, gifted women. She faced a rocky and abusive marriage to her first husband, Bill. She strove to be a great mother to her children, but, without good support, found it a struggle.

Where then could she turn? Where was her hope to be found?

In her grief and distress, Joy began to read even more and discovered C.S. Lewis' writings. She prayed and opened her eyes to the world around her. It was then that she noticed a presence with her. She would later come to know that it was Jesus.

After Joy's conversion experience and after exploring many religions and philosophies, she wrote, "the Redeemer who had made himself known, whose personality I would have recognized among ten thousand – He was Jesus."

Her relationship with Jesus was what grounded her and gave her hope throughout her life. In Joy's later years, when it seemed her life was finally coming together (I will not spoil the details), she received an awful diagnosis. Instead of giving up hope, Joy would go on to travel and sought to enjoy the beauty of life. She married C.S. Lewis and continued to live the rest of her life learning, loving, and growing deeper in her relationship with her loved ones and with God. She died on July 13, 1960, at age 45.

Her husband C.S. Lewis died three years later and has a saint's day observed by Episcopalians on November 22. It is important for us to remember his wife Joy, at this time as well, who inspired, encouraged, and shaped Lewis and his writings. I believe he would say the same.

As the Church, we may sometimes feel we have little to offer the world. It often seems the world has more exciting, new, and flashy things to entice people. Yet, what we have to share with the world is the hope in Christ – a hope that lasts and will not disappoint. No matter what changes around us, the Gospel truth does not change.

The good news of the Gospel is that God loves us so much that he does not leave us. He does not leave us in our sin and fallenness. He does not leave us in our troubles. The prophet says:

“but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)

This is the hope that Joy found in her life. It is the hope we have as Christians, and that we are called upon to share with the world. Nothing and no one else should have our full trust and hope. It is in the Lord that we can place our highest expectations and our deepest trust.

Our hope must always be in our Redeemer who loves us and makes himself known.