

Be Encouraged

By Sheila Johnson

Over the years, my life's circumstances and experiences have caused me to develop an intimate relationship with hope. Before it was born into my spirit, it moved through its fetal stages, nourished by knowledge, compassion, and reassurance. It was a knowledge that my parents and others in my village would guide my small, stumbling steps toward solid forward movement; a knowledge that they would always pick me up when I fell down; a knowledge that they would always wipe the tears from my eyes; and a knowledge that they would always feed me when I hungered. My fetal hope was nourished by a compassion that loved me through my wrong doing and wrong speaking, empathized with my losses no matter how great or how small, and loved me without judgment. And in its final trimester, my unborn hope was given the reassurance that it was okay to enter a soul that lived in a world clouded by doubt and fear, death and destruction, and a myriad of uncertainties. My hope was covered by my faith in God, trust in self, and scientific knowledge that the sun comes up every day somewhere in the world. Hope eternal was born within me.

I have seen the remnants of war, the scars left by raging hurricanes, the death of victims of racism and hate. I have heard the cries of starving people, of men and women damaged by domestic violence, and many of God's people who exist behind bars. I believe that injustice thrives in our institutions of law and order, halls of justice, and buildings designated for education. The world is seldom fair, yet it is hope that has delivered every living, believing soul into a better place no matter how long the journey.

If I were a philosopher, I could state with confidence the following about hope:

- Hope is born and cannot be artificially created.
- Hope cannot be touched, only felt.
- Hope cannot be physically carried, but transported by faithful souls.
- Hope is a cerebral exercise that often leaves the physical body exuberant with joy or exacerbated by disappointment.

Hope is a lifeline, yet a direct path to death if it is hidden. It only takes one ray of hope to shatter darkness.

As we, people created in the image of God, journey forward with uncertainties and doubts about ourselves, our world neighbors, politics, global warming, physical well-being, health care, resources, and safe housing, let us never forget the words of the great writer Emily Dickinson, "Hope is the thing with feathers—That perches in the soul—And sings the tune without the words—and never stops-at all."

Hope springs eternal.