

Hope Even Now

*Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops at all.*

- Emily Dickinson

By Drew Cauthorn

I was a team member on a Kairos weekend in April 2013 at the Torres Unit, a Texas state prison near Hondo. Kairos is a four-day Christian retreat structured like Cursillo. There are seven tables, called families, each composed of six “men in white” (Inmates are referred to as “men in white” because all Texas inmates wear white) and three volunteer team members.

I remember the fear I felt during preparation for the weekend and especially when I first entered Torres. As you enter, a sign declares, “No hostage will leave this prison.” The gates clang loudly behind you as you enter, and everywhere you look there is razor wire atop tall chain-link fences. As I entered the prison gym, where the retreat was held, I heard a raucous prison band. I was introduced by name as if I were a member of the Spurs, and I was hugged by men in white who had attended prior Kairos retreats and who were acting as servants for the retreat. At that moment, fear left and never returned.

The retreat began on a Thursday. During the retreat, there were meditations and talks given by volunteers, activities, singing, and meals together. By Saturday and Sunday there was intimate sharing. We bonded as brothers in Christ.

Still, what struck me was how very lonely those men were. I decided to regularly write to every man I made a connection with. I committed to myself that I would always be truthful in every letter, and every letter would contain hope.

Over the course of 7+ years, 35 men in white and I have exchanged over 1,000 letters. They have taught me so much about hope. I have learned:

“Hope” you have a nice day and “Hope” offered by God are different.

God’s hope is grounded in God’s promises and is eternal.

God’s hope is the foundation on which the men in white I know are rebuilding their lives.

Witnessing men in white, who are estranged from society, their families and their very selves, rebuild their lives with only God’s hope to stand on has strengthened my faith.

When I experience the hope men in white possess, I understand the hope Emily Dickinson describes in her poems, and I whistle. I also see the fulfillment of Romans 15:13.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13

Questions for reflection:

What one thought or idea about hope that is expressed in the materials for this week especially intrigues, provokes, disturbs, challenges, encourages, warms, warns, helps or surprises you?

What does hope fuel in your life?

Is there a difference between what you say and what you do? Does hope play a role in that?

Do you know the hope that Emily Dickinson is describing in her poem?