

“Steadfast Faith” - Rev. Adam Hange, 11/9/2025, Hillsboro UCC

Opening Prayer:

*Still-speaking God,
quiet our hearts and open our ears.*

*Let your Word meet us here —
in scripture, in our neighbors,
and in the world you so love.*

*Give us courage to hear,
and faith to respond.*

*Speak, Holy One —
we are listening.
Amen.*

Some weeks, our world feels like it’s trembling — not always with one dramatic shock, but with a low, persistent rumble beneath our feet. A quiet hum of anxiety in the background of our daily life.

A parent wondering whether the grocery budget will stretch far enough.

A federal worker enduring another week without certainty, watching bills come due.

Families in our neighborhoods praying that everyone makes it home from school, or work, or worship — that an ordinary day won’t end in detention or separation.

And yet — even in the midst of this uncertainty — there have been glimpses of grace.

Elections that reminded us that democracy is not sleeping after all.

A federal judge affirming the limits of executive power, protecting our state from unlawful deployment of military force.

And right here in our community, the release of our neighbor, **Víctor Cruz** —

unjustly detained, now reunited with loved ones because people prayed,
organized, called, and refused to give up.

There *IS* real hope. We've seen it.

And still... that tremor... hasn't stopped.

There are headlines that keep us awake.

There are systems of oppression that grind on, long after the news cameras leave.

With this constant hum, feelings of grief and uncertainty begin to accumulate in
our bones.

Moments like these stir something deep within us — concern, grief, anger... and
yes, even determination.

At the beginning of a crisis, we often rise with conviction:

We march. We call. We donate. We show up.

We pray with fire in our bones.

But then time passes.

The headlines shift.

Fatigue settles in.

The urgent becomes the ongoing.

We don't stop caring — we just become tired.

A quiet voice begins to whisper:

Maybe this is just how things are now. Maybe nothing will change.

And yet — even then, some people keep showing up.

Even when the crowds thin.

Even when momentum slows.

Even when the world moves on.

This morning, I think of the Ukrainian people — long after global attention faded.

They continue to defend their homes, rebuild communities, educate children,
grow crops in shattered soil, and make music in the midst of heartbreak.

They refuse to give up. not because victory is guaranteed, but because dignity is

sacred.

Because hope is not a feeling — it is a practice.

That kind of stubborn hope — that's not just political courage.

It's **spiritual courage**.

It is **steadfast faith**.

And when we listen to Scripture today, we hear echoes of that same spirit — the call to keep showing up, to trust what we cannot yet see, and to believe that God is not finished with us or this world.

The Shaken Church of Thessalonica

The believers in Thessalonica lived in a world that felt unsteady, too.

Thessalonica was — and still is — one of the great cities of northern Greece.

A major port on the Aegean Sea.

A multi-cultural crossroads.

And a strategic Roman stronghold *where loyalty to Caesar was expected*.

The earliest Christians there, were a tiny minority — a new, fragile community trying to follow the teachings of Jesus, in a culture where **Caesar was lord**, not Christ.

If we were to read through the first letter to the Thessalonians, we would be reminded that these early followers of The Way believed Christ would return **soon**.

Not someday.

Not eventually.

But at any moment.

Any moment, God would overturn injustice, topple empires, and heal the broken and hurting places of the world.

But time stretched on.

Rome did not fall.

Persecution continued.

And in 70 CE — the city of **Jerusalem was attacked; the Temple** — the spiritual center and symbol of God's presence on earth - desecrated and **destroyed!**

Imagine the shock.

Imagine the grief.

For Jewish followers of Jesus, and for the early Christian movement, it shattered expectations and raised painful questions:

If God is with us, how could this happen?

Where is the deliverance that was promised?

Where is Christ, our defender, hope, and salvation?

You see, salvation was about much more than eternity, it was salvation from the trials and tribulations of the here and now.

Some believers were panicking. Some were being misled by sensational rumors.

Some, apparently, were giving up on work and responsibility, thinking the end was so near that nothing else mattered.

Some were simply exhausted and losing hope.

And into that moment, the writer of 2 Thessalonians — whether Paul himself, or more likely a faithful disciple writing in Paul's voice — offers a steadying word:

“Do not be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed.”

“Do not let yourself be deceived.”

“Stand firm.”

And, “May God strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.”

He does not say,
“Everything is fine.”

He does not say,
“Just wait quietly.”

He does not say,
“Faith means pretending you’re not afraid.”

He says: **Hold on. Stay steady. And keep doing good.**

This is not a call to passive endurance. It is a call to **active perseverance**.

Faith for the Long Haul

One of the hardest truths about discipleship is this:

Burst-of-energy faith is easy. Long obedience faith... is hard.

Anyone can show up once. Anyone can care intensely for a week.

But Christian hope — biblical hope — is not a sprint; it is a marathon.

And we need to say this clearly: **burnout is real.**

It is not failure. It is not weakness. It is the natural result of holding too much for too long in a world that keeps piling more upon us.

And, if we take a moment to reflect, we must admit, not all that weight is distributed equally.

In our homes, in our churches, in our movements for justice,
a disproportionate amount of the emotional, caregiving, and advocacy labor falls on **women** —
especially **young women**,
and especially **young women of color**,
whose leadership is celebrated when convenient and relied upon,
but who are too often left without the structural support, resources, and rest they deserve.

If that's you... I want to say...

We see you.
God sees you.
And you deserve rest — not just responsibility.
Joy — not just duty.
Companions and co-laborers — not isolation.

The burden of hope-work was never meant to fall on the shoulders of a few heroes.

It is the work of the whole Body of Christ.

There are moments when we can run on fire and adrenaline.
But most of our holy work is done on **grace**,
and **community**,
and the slow, steady power of showing up again and again.

Whether the news is good, bad, or a mix of both.

Steadfast Hope: A Holy Stubbornness

Paul (or Paul's disciple) prays:

“God will strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.”

Not strengthen your **opinions**.

Strengthen your **hearts** —

your courage, your compassion, your capacity to keep loving
when it would be far easier to give up, escape, or shut down.

We sometimes get this idea that Faith is primarily concerned about eternity.

In fact, I think for most of us, faith is much more about... will there be money for food this month, will my loved one be OK, and will my small efforts make any difference... whatsoever...

Faith is not passive.

Faith does not wait for God to fix everything while we spectate.

Faith **participates** in God’s healing work.

God has never called us to escapism.

God calls us to **engagement**,
to justice that is gentle and fierce,
to **mercy** that is tender and bold,
to hope that is **stubborn** and *contagious*.

Hope is not naive.

Hope is **refusal** — refusal to hand the future over to fear, or apathy, or resignation.

A Tree Planted in Troubled Ground

Scripture uses the image of a tree planted by water — roots deep, branches reaching.

Trees do not grow by rushing.

They grow by staying.

Faith is not frantic —
faith is **rooted**.

And I am reminded of the Ukrainian novelist and poet Serhiy Zhadan, interviewed early in the war. When asked why he refused to leave Kharkiv, he said:

“We stay because this is our home. And you don't give up your home.”

That is not naïve optimism.

That is not denial of suffering.

That is **steadfastness** — a holy refusal to surrender what is beloved.

A way of saying, in the face of violence and uncertainty:

We will not stop caring. We will not stop showing up. This is ours to tend, and we are not leaving our post.

That kind of grounded, rooted, stubborn love —
that is what faith looks like in real life.

Where Are the Glimmers of Hope?

Even now — especially now — there are glimmers:

Mutual aid networks.

Young leaders rising.

Communities learning to show up for one another.

Movements grounded in joy as much as urgency.

Congregations planting trees and gardens,
refusing despair as a spiritual practice.

Hope is not found in dramatic victories alone —
it is found in small, consistent acts of love,

in the resilience of community,
in choosing compassion again tomorrow.

We are not called to burnout.

We are called to **faithfulness**.

We are not asked to do everything.

We are asked to do **our part**, again and again, with courage and humility.

Closing

So take a breath.

Feel your feet planted.

Root yourself in grace.

We do not stand alone.

We stand with the saints,

with the courageous,

with communities around the world who refuse to give up,

with believers in Thessalonica who held on through trembling times,

and with the God who holds us all.

Do not be shaken.

Do not lose heart.

Stand firm in love.

And above all — **keep showing up**.

For God's future is still unfolding.

And by grace — so are we.

Amen.