

# Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, November 17, 2024  
"Hope Amid Chaos"

## *A Brief History Lesson*

How many of you have heard of the "lot" being used to make decisions?

Historically, Moravians used what's called the "lot" to help them make decisions of all kinds – from who could marry, to who should be running the church, and all kinds of things in between.

The way the lot worked was that they would have three possible responses to their question written on three pieces of paper.

One would say "yes" (in whatever language the group used depending on their location), one would say "no," and one would say "not yet."

Then, they would ask the question that they sought to answer, and they would choose one of the three pieces of paper.

Whatever the paper said was the absolute, indisputable answer.

So, for example, when I was called to Good Shepherd Church, they would have had to use this system to decide if they wanted to hire me.

The Board would ask the lot if they should hire me as their pastor.

Then, they would write the three possible responses on three pieces of paper.

They would mix up the paper and choose one.

If they chose the "no" response, they would have to go back to the drawing board, regardless of how much they liked me and wanted to hire me.

If they chose the "yes" response, they would have to hire me, even if they really thought I was a terrible choice.

And, if they chose the "not yet" response, they would have had to wait until a future date and try the lot again.

The early Moravians believed emphatically that the lot was a way to take their personal opinions out of the equation. Instead, they deemed the response the lot gave as God's final word on the matter.

In other words, it was their way of bringing God into their decision-making process, ensuring that they were not making decisions based solely on their own emotional state at the time.

It also took the debate out of the process. Decisions could not be argued about after the fact because they believed that God had led them to that decision.

If they had debated it, it would have been like debating God's will.

So, imagine you have found the absolute love of your life.

The person is attractive, kind, genuine, and cares deeply for you, and you wish to marry them.

But, in the early Moravian system, you could not simply choose to marry someone without first asking the lot.

So, a man would have to begin by asking a woman if she would consider marrying him.

Then, assuming she said yes, they would take the proposal to the community leadership, and they would present the choice to the lot.

If the lot said yes, then they would confirm with the woman that she indeed wanted to marry the man.

If the "lot" said no, however, that decision was final. They could not ask again in the future, and each person would need to seek another potential partner instead.

And, if they chose "not yet" they would have to wait and ask the lot again at a future date.

Can you imagine the nail-biting anxiety of waiting to see what the lot said about your future spouse?

I can understand the *theory* behind this system.

After all, it demonstrates a strict devotion to God that they would rely so heavily on a system which believed this was God's way of speaking in their lives.

And yet, in practice, I could imagine it potentially being devastating if people desperately wanted a "yes" response but instead received a resounding "no".

It is with this process in mind that we turn now to the Moravian settlement of Herrnhut in Germany.

In 1736, the Moravians held a Synod, much like our current Synods. At the end of that Synod, their Chief Elder, Leonhard Dober, asked to be relieved of his position.

His skills simply didn't meet the need, but it had also become a position that could not be done by one person alone. He was tired.

The Moravian church had spread far and wide through missionary work across the globe and it was a lot to manage.

They chose to postpone the discussion about his resignation until June of the following year, at which time they decided to deal with Dober's decision.

But, his resignation was not accepted by the lot so it had to wait until a future Synod.

Finally, in 1741, 5 years later, the lot supported Dober's resignation, which left them with the task of electing a new Chief Elder.

Various members of the community were nominated, but the lot declined each nomination.

So finally, those gathered for the Synod in 1741 decided not to appoint another person to the position.

Instead, they decided to put forth Jesus Christ himself as their Chief Elder.

They posed the following question to the lot: "Whether this signified that the Saviour would himself undertake the office."

The lot's response to this question was "yes."

It was on November 13th, 1741, that this major decision was announced to the members of the church.

Through a time of turmoil and chaos, when they were anxious about who would take on this very important role within the church, Jesus Christ brought hope to their community.

And now, for the last 283 years, we have celebrated Christ as our Chief Elder on November 13<sup>th</sup> each year.

In practice, what this means for us is that we are asked to remember – especially in our service on Boards and in leadership roles within the church – to acknowledge that we look to Christ first and foremost when we are making decisions that might affect our community.

It is symbolic, but deeply meaningful and provides us with hope that even when we work to make difficult decisions, Christ walks with us and guides us in all that we do.

### ***The Message***

So, this history lesson leads us to today, just four days after the November 13<sup>th</sup> celebration, when we heard a rather apocalyptic scripture reading from the Gospel of Mark.

Jesus says “watch out! When you hear about wars and threats of wars, don’t be afraid.”

That’s easier said than done, don’t you think, Jesus?

But then he says, “These things will have to happen, but that isn’t the end.”

He goes on to warn that nations will go to war against each other, there will be natural disasters, and people will starve, and that all of this is just the beginning of the troubles. It sounds rather discouraging.

And yet, these things will inevitably happen, whether Jesus predicted it or not, because it is the way of the world and the way of humanity.

In this rather scary passage, Jesus is giving us hope, believe it or not.

Just like when the Moravians of the mid-1700’s needed reassurance when their steadfast leadership was changing and their world felt like it was in chaos, Jesus once again provided them with hope.

Jesus acknowledges in this passage that difficult times lay ahead.

And if we are being honest, he doesn’t just mean imminently. He means always and forever.

We know this because we have experienced it in our own lives.

We don’t just experience challenges, turmoil, and chaos globally.

We know about the chaos and devastation that he speaks of because we have felt it in our own hearts, and we are aware of it all around us.

Some of us are in the middle of it right now, and nearly all of us have experienced it at some point in our past.

But Jesus is reminding us here that when we are in the middle of the storm, he is right there with us.

It is not the end, he assures us.

It reminds me of the song “Eye of the Storm” by Ryan Stevenson. He sings:

In the eye of the storm,  
You remain in control  
And in the middle of the war  
You guard my soul  
You alone are the anchor  
When my sails are torn  
Your love surrounds me,  
In the eye of the storm.

Ryan reminds us that Jesus doesn't promise us that there will never be a storm.

Jesus knows too much about the human condition to be able to promise us that.

But he does promise that no matter what happens, God is with us through it all.

Jesus cannot stop what he predicts is to come for his disciples, nor can he stop disaster and chaos from affecting us.

But he can join us in the storm.

He can sit right there with us when we are riding out the storm – a shining beacon of hope in a dreary or stormy sky of despair.

He can be our hope amid the chaos, whether than chaos is in our hearts, our minds, our families, our communities, our country, or our world.

So, may we always remember that Jesus is our hope and our guiding light when all feels lost.

We are not lost because Jesus is always with us.

Just as our early Moravian forebears knew that Jesus was right there with them, guiding them through their uncertainty, may we also know this to be true in our own lives.

Amen.

God of hope, we thank you for all the blessings of this life. For the gift of life. For the gift of Christ, for the gift of the Holy Spirit, for your tender mercy. For Your saving love.

Let Your love, steadfast and faithful, be a great sign from heaven.

May Your peace bend our will to your will, like trees in a strong wind.

Signs of heaven, sighs of hope. Amen.