

The past 10 days have been just a roller coaster of everything going on. And last night, just totally capped it all off. I got the pleasure of being at Saint John's and doing their service last night. And I walked in with this expectations of how everything was going to go because of everything I was told and promised. And I knew better, but I still expected. But it was still, it was a lot of fun. Things were different. They changed. Things were different for them, but it was still wonderful, and they were all like, hey, it's great. Those of you that came, like, oh, it's fantastic, you guys don't have to go to church tomorrow. And I overheard each one of them, and they're like, no, no, we still have to go. I'm, like, but you don't have to go. You get to go right. We get to spend time together. We get to be a part of this wonderful family. That was one thing that I heard over and over and over.

Last week, at General Synod. If you haven't gone, which I don't know if anybody has, you hear a lot of I have to do things. And that's not who we are. That's not who the UCC is. We get to do things because we love God's word. We love God's message, and we love doing things to help people. It's a wonderful thing. That's why I love Christmas. That's why I make sure that we do the Christmas season. It's the only time of year that everybody in the world feels the same way we do every day. It's the only time of year the people get to share hope, and we need that so much. Right now, we need it in so many different levels. We see so many things when we're doomscrolling at night.

That was the best part about being gone. I could never be on my phone. I get up at four o'clock every morning, I go to bed at midnight. And I would check my phone like three times throughout the day, so I had no idea what was going on in the outside world. I was very disappointed when I heard about Stephen Colbert getting canceled, but the rest of the week was fantastic. But we get to talk about Hope. It's one of the things that we miss out on so frequently. We forget about Hope.

Jeremiah is telling everybody. He's telling everybody from Israel and Judah that there will be hope. At this point, remember everything that could go wrong for these people has. Everything is an absolute end for them. Israel and Judah have split. Israel has been conquered and is gone. Judah has now been canceled. They've been conquered. The temple's been destroyed. They've been exiled. Nobody is there anymore. Their king was murdered, thrown out in front of everybody, and left to rot as a carcass. These are a lot of things that would not give you hope. But God spoke to Jeremiah and he said one day you will have a new king. You will have somebody come from the line of David. You will have hope again.

I speak with a lot of people. A lot of people have lost hope, and you can see it. You can see it in what they do, how they interact. But there are more people who have not lost hope, and you can see that in how they live and how they interact. I know I started today complaining about me hurting my back, and I did that for a point. If that's the worst thing that happens to me this week, I am very, very lucky. I'm very lucky because I have all of you. And I met so many new people this week, and I know I have half of them as friends. I made a lot of people angry. But they have hope. They have hope that we will have a better community because of the work that we do. And they hope that a little bit of work that we do here is going to extend out to somebody else.

You know, we have more people watching us all the time. I get emails and questions and phone calls asking about the backpack program. How did we start it? Where do we go from

there? I have people calling and asking about the Lenten luncheons. Now, it's great to hear from the community. Doesn't this? We need to do this, too. People are looking at us as those beacons of hope that they have. We should all feel very proud that we get to participate in that. We don't have to participate in that. We get to participate in it. We get to be hope for others, and sometimes it's a big burden that we put upon ourselves. So that burden isn't ours alone. It's for everybody. Jesus tells us to give him our burdens. By doing his work, am I showing that hope it makes our lives so much better? And with that, we are hope for others, and we get to share with them. And we get to make their burdens lighter, too. Let us pray.