

## ***Misplaced Hope?***

Not long ago we came across an interesting account about the work of the late Dr. Karl Menninger. Dr. Menninger was a prominent psychiatrist of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century who was convinced that his patients might improve from their problems more readily if they could draw upon hope. So he went to the public library in search of source material on hope. He claimed that he found many volumes on faith, and more yet on love, but none on hope. He turned then to the Encyclopedia Britannica and found the same thing. The editors had included many columns on faith, and many more on love, but hope was not even mentioned. Menninger concluded, all those years ago, that his era was not an era of hope. There was simply so much tragedy and discouragement in his day that hope, true hope, seemed misplaced.

Do we live in such a time? Is our era any different, or do we, too, live in a time when hope seems misplaced? Well, if you watch the news channels regularly you might think we do. Each day we are bombarded with acrimonious debates about virtually everything from the threat of terrorism, to the possible degradation of the environment, to worldwide financial woes. Some would even tell us that our western world will be utterly overwhelmed by outside forces: religious, ideological, and political, within the next one hundred years, and our whole culture will simply disappear!

So are there reasons to feel hopeless? Maybe so. And yet, Menninger came to a different conclusion as he researched hope all those years ago. Menninger said that we commonly think that it is hopeless times and hopeless situations that produce hopeless people. But he said, the reverse is certainly also true. In other words, hopeless people create hopeless times and hopeless situations. The attitude we take helps to determine the outcomes that we will experience. There is something wonderfully promising in that assertion, because it implies that if there were enough hopeful people, we could take what seem like hopeless situations and see them utterly transformed.

Do you dare to hope? Think for a moment about those things which comprise your deepest, dearest, seemingly impossible hopes. What would they be? ... a restored relationship? Some new sense of direction? Some sense of certainty for what lies ahead? Some reassurance that the hardship, illness, or grief you face now will soon be transcended? Is it justifiable to let yourself hope for these things? Is such hope futile? Is it crazy?

Well, according to Dr. Menninger hope is the farthest thing from crazy. And those of us who claim to be people of faith would have to agree. Hope is not blind optimism, after all. It is more like a stance toward life that is based on an abiding trust in Someone whom we have come to believe will not deny us or desert us.

If we allowed the full power of such foundational hope into our hearts, what might become real for us? Could it help change our lives? The life of another? Something the world needs to see changed? What might change for you, if you let yourself hope enough?