



February 5, 2024

Signs of hope from a furry rodent

You do kinda feel sorry for him. There he is, warmly snuggled down in his own private burrow when a bunch of old guys in top hats drag him out and hold him up to the sun. If I was in his place, I think I would want six more weeks of winter, too. Of course, I am speaking of Punxsutawney Pete, the prognosticating ground hog of international fame. Ever since 1887, a little town that doesn't have much more than a rodent to celebrate marks February 2 as the biggest day of the year. I grew up not far from there and it's a nice town, but not as romantic as the movie makes it seem.

The holiday derives from a tradition the Pennsylvania Dutch brought from Germany where the badger is the forecasting animal. It has deep roots in the Christian tradition of **Candlemas**, which tracks back even further to the ancient Roman rite for the goddess *Februa* celebrated with a procession of candles.

Candlemas, the 40th day after Christmas, remembers the presentation of the baby Jesus in the temple and is one of the oldest Christian holidays, recorded as early as 360AD.

Back to the weatherman from Punxy...

Of course, it is great fun in the dull doldrums of February and the movie just makes it that much more interesting. This time of year, we long for the first signs of spring, which in northern Michigan is still a long way off. In the midst of the mundane, we look for signs of hope. In the lingering darkness of winter, we seek out the glimmers of light which promise a brighter day still to come. It's all about living in hope.

St. Paul says, "*We celebrate in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also celebrate in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character and character produces hope...and*

hope does not disappoint us.” (Romans 5:1-4)

Regardless of the ground hog, we live in hope, knowing that our hope for the future is based on something deeper still. It is grounded (...get it? ground-ed?) in the sure promises of God.

And that will never disappoint.

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PS: As every Pennsylvanian knows, the Pennsylvania Dutch were not really Dutch, they were Deutsch, that is German, but the English settlers around them didn't seem to know the difference.

~Written by Jack Harnish

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