

## ON YOUR MARK, GET SET, HOPE!

Isaiah 11:1-10

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Remember when? Remember when:  
Visions of sugar plums danced in your head,  
Silent night was an exciting night,  
Away in a manger didn't seem so far away,  
Remember when you couldn't wait for Christmas?

Life has a way of turning our hopes and dreams into obligations and responsibilities. The child within us gives way to the adult that is out daily earning a living, fulfilling roles, meeting the deadlines of life. Maybe here in December it's time to visit that child again, the child that lives within.

The prophet Isaiah says that after the dynasty of David is nothing more than an old stump, a branch will grow out of its roots – and that *a little child will lead them*. What if the Christ child touched your inner child today and you found peace, hope, joy and love? *A little child shall lead them*.

A LITTLE CHILD CAN LEAD US FROM FEAR TO TRUST. *The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra. The weaned child shall play over the nest of the bees*. What a picture, what a picture of peace.

Did you see on the news the other night, how a 93-year old woman dealt with a would-be robber? She bought her groceries at Wal-mart. When she climbed in her car a thief climbed in beside her. "I've got a gun, give me your money or I will kill you!" said the thief. But the woman replied, "You don't want to kill me. If you kill me I will go straight to heaven and I'll be with Jesus and if you kill me you will go to hell. You don't want to do that." For the next 10 minutes the woman witnessed to the man about her faith, and suddenly a tear appeared in the thief's eye. He said "I think maybe I'd better go home and pray." She said, "Jesus is right here in this car, you can pray here." The tears started streaming down his face. After a while he leaned over and kissed her. She gave him \$10, all the money she had in her purse, and told him not to spend it on whiskey. The man jumped out of the car and hopefully went home.

We are called to live by trust, not by fear.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge God and he will direct your paths.* That's easier said than done.

I grew up the only kid in a crowd of adults. I was constantly bullied and teased. I became afraid, afraid of being beat up, physically hurt.

I started college so socially inadequate that I lived in constant fear of failure, that somehow I would not be able to make the grade. I didn't know I could make it in college.

For years I was afraid I would not make it in the ministry, that somebody would stand in the way of my success, stop me from reaching my full potential. I ministered through fear.

Then, one day with God's help, I let go of my fears. I heard the angels singing "*Fear not for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be for all people.*" The "good tidings of great joy" for me was that "you don't have to be afraid anymore; you don't have to be scared of anybody. You can be free!" Suddenly I realized I didn't have to get anywhere; in fact, I was already home. Have you learned to live like that?

Tennessee Williams said, "Fear and evasion are the two beasts that chase each other's tails in the revolving wire cage of our nervous world."

Our days are beset by danger, everybody seems to be cautious. Hear an angelic voice – Be not afraid. Instead of looking backward for safe lodgings, we need to march forward to greater heights where lies our fullest happiness. Give the Lord your fears and live.

A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD US FROM CHAOS TO CALM  
*The wolf will lie down with the lamb.* What a picture of peace Isaiah paints.

Antonio Peck was a kindergarten student in upstate New York. His teacher asked her students to draw a picture for parent's day. Antonio's picture included child-ren picking up litter, children holding hands around the globe, and a white-robed man kneeling in the left-hand corner.

When teachers hung up Antonio's picture, along with 80 others, they folded over the white-robed man assuming him to be Jesus, which also covered up half of Antonio's name. That didn't suit Antonio and his parents. The result is that Antonio and the School District are in New York State Supreme Court trying to understand the separation of Church and State because of displaying religious symbols in a classroom. *A child shall lead them.*

I read two philosophers this week, both of whom said Hope died in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I didn't believe the first, but when the second one said it I thought maybe I ought to think about it. Hope died in the 20<sup>th</sup> century they say. I thought at first, how could that be?

We started so optimistically. Consecrated to the "survival of the fittest" we believed in human progress and achievement. The 20<sup>th</sup> century alone gave us the telephone, the television, the automobile, the computer, skyscrapers and moonwalkers, I-pods and I-phones. The list goes on and on. One would think we could do anything. And maybe that is our problem.

We bought a bill of goods that we could do anything and we could do everything and then we discovered that we didn't know how to live together. The 20<sup>th</sup> century gave us two World Wars and endless conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq. The 20<sup>th</sup> century gave us struggles for justice and revealed the true depth of racism, classism, and sexism.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century gave us a great surge in religious systems and enthusiasm and great religious institutions and denominations like Methodism. Then we went through a great cleansing of religious reference from civic life. Secularism replaced the sacred as our philosophy of life. Something happened to us in the process.

Today the optimism written in the doctrine of human progress is gone. Hope confined to worldly possibilities is scarcely any hope at all. Belief that we can control reality is an illusion at best. A country grounded in self-absorption is sure to die. Hope died in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If it did, maybe it's time to let our children draw pictures of hope again. From chaos to calm, from fear to trust. *A little child shall lead us.*

#### A LITTLE CHILD CAN MOVE US FROM DOUBT TO UNDERSTANDING

*The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters that cover the sea.* What a beautiful picture.

When our oldest son, Wes, was about 6, he dared to question the existence of Santa Claus. But Santa would have nothing to do with such nonsense, and contacted Sandy and me with a proposition. "Would it be all right if I stopped by early on my earthly flight and left off Wes' gifts before night?" asked Santa. Of course, we agreed. So about 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve Santa came to our house. When Wes came down the steps to find Santa on his knees under the Christmas tree, he never dared to doubt again. At age 37, he still believes in Santa Claus.

Many things about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand,  
But I know who holds tomorrow, and I know He holds my hand.

Hope is not built on a blueprint of what tomorrow brings. Hope is built around the solid truth of who God is: God has created and is creating. God has watched over us through the night and will guide us through the day. Not even death can separate us from the Love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Hope that gets us through the day is not based on facts and guaranteed results, but upon courageous assurances that inspire the heart to act.

So, on your mark! Get set! HOPE! Hope is an action verb. Hope is of scant worth unless we are willing to act.  
**Hope is a forward adventure.**

When the children of Israel wanted to return to the flesh pots of Egypt, Moses pushed them further into the wilderness adventure. Hope lies out there, not back here. You've got to keep going.

When the Israelites became fearful in the Promised Land, Joshua encouraged them to "*Choose this day whom you will serve, but for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" Hope pushes forward; hope goes into the future; hope doesn't give up, not now or ever. Hope keeps pushing on.

When the new nation became complacent, the prophets came speaking against the emptiness of formalized worship, challenging them to make ethics a matter of practice as well as conversation. Hope lies out there in the future and you've got to keep marching toward it, again and again.

Then Jesus comes, not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill the Law. So He explains the nature of the further mile one

may go to love his neighbor, even if they act like enemies. What does it mean to go the second mile? It means don't stop; don't stop too quickly; don't give up too soon; don't turn back before it's time. Push on. Hope is lying out there in your future. It's an adventure that you take, it's a direction you turn; it's a life you live

Shall anything less than Paradise restored satisfy our hungry souls, where one day *the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra and the young child will put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain...*

Down in my heart I do believe that the best is yet to be. Down in my heart I do believe that hope lies on the horizon and that whatever you face in life, whatever the circumstances of your days, whatever the struggles of your times may be, hope is there. It comes in the night, it helps you through the day, it will help you through the evening as well. You can hope.

On your mark. Get set. HOPE! God is the source of all our hopes.  
Amen.

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