

“A Shot of Hope”

Hebrews 10:19-25

Series: The Missing Peace Week 6. Hope

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hogle

The Woodside Church

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I was ecstatic! An email informed me Clergy are now included in 1B. What is 1B? The second group to get a Covid19 vaccination. I felt honored and affirmed! As a clergy member I expected to be last on the list – down there with the clowns and carnival workers. The minute I saw the email I registered online. Then waited. And waited. And waited. When I checked to find out what’s holding things up I discovered the problem: the 1A group is growing bigger and bigger. Now I definitely believe people with high risk conditions should go before me. But how did people with tennis elbow, bunions and bad breath get on there? I complained to my wife. She said, “Now Doug. You just have to use some of that patience, peace and hope you’re always preaching about. Remember what Jesus said, ‘The first shall be last and the last shall be first.’” “You’re right honey.” I gave her a hug. Then I noticed something. I rolled up her sleeve and found a vaccination band aid. She looked at me and said, “Well somebody has to be first.”

The Coronavirus Vaccine gives us Hope – Hope we can save more lives, Hope we can get back to work and school, Hope we can one day emerge to some sense of normalcy. This shot gives us Hope there is light at the end of this tunnel.

Yet some ask, “What if the light at the end of the tunnel is an oncoming train?” What if the virus mutates? What if it takes more than a year to get everyone vaccinated? What if I get the virus before I get the vaccine? And there are other fears which haunt us. What if my marriage, my family, my job, my health, my loved ones don’t survive this pandemic? We worry about the state of our schools, our economy, our leaders, our nation, our world. It’s like you’re in a boat on a storm tossed sea, riding every crest and trough, driven by every gust and gale. It’s hard to have Hope when you’re not standing on firm ground, when nothing is solid and nothing is certain.

Fear not brothers and sisters: Jesus gives you Hope. His Hope is more solid than granite, more certain than death and taxes, more sure than the rising Sun. The Book of Hebrews says,

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever. Hebrews 6:19-20

Like an anchor holds a ship secure in a storm, the Hope of Jesus keeps us safe and steady while all around us rises and falls. How do you get a shot of this certain Hope in uncertain times?

First, **Draw Near to God with Faith.** The writer of Hebrews says, “Let us draw near to God...” Hebrews 10:22 God is the source of all Hope. He is bigger, stronger, higher and deeper than the shifting circumstances which cause us worry, anxiety and despair. So the closer you stand to Him the more you will stand on the solid ground of Hope. So how do you draw near to God?

In Bible times this was not possible. The place on earth closest to God was a room in the Jerusalem Temple called The Most Holy Place. In Old Testament times it was where the Ark of

the Covenant stood. In both Old and New Testament times it was the place where God's presence touched the earth. A curtain covered the opening to the Most Holy Place. Only priests could go in the Temple and only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place on one day of the year – the Day of Atonement – Yom Kippur. On that day, the High Priest entered to offer sacrifices to wipe away sin and reunite God and His people – to make them At-One with each other.

Why all this separation between us and God? The virus of sin. It infects everything we do. It spreads everywhere we go. No mask, hand washing or social distancing can stop it. Sinful people cannot draw near to a Holy God. God's holiness annihilates sin just as light banishes darkness and bleach obliterates mold. The priests, the Temple and the sacrifices were the method for cleansing sin but it only treated the symptoms of sin. Since the inner virus causes us to keep sinning, these methods needed to be constantly repeated. Every year the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place to establish atonement for another year.

I've heard the coronavirus vaccine stops the effects of the disease not the disease itself. Scientists are also still unsure if the shot is once and done or must be repeated each year like the flu. I'm not an expert and I'm not casting doubt on the vaccine. Please Get the Shot! I'm simply pointing out the endless sacrifices in the Temple did not permanently destroy sin and draw us near to God. We need Someone to eradicate and purify us from the disease of sin once and for all. Our only Hope is Jesus. Hebrews says,

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God
Hebrews 10:19-22

Hebrews says Jesus is the sacrifice which completely cleanses our sin, He is the curtain through which we enter the Most Holy Place, He is even the High Priest who performs the Atonement. Only a human should do this, only God could do this – Jesus is both. His death and resurrection are the once and done shot which wipes away sin for all time. Because of what Jesus our Sacrifice and High Priest did, we can do what no person could ever do before – we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place not on earth but in heaven. The word *confidence* means we can boldly enter, courageously enter, fearlessly enter, cheerfully enter, freely enter and draw near to God. Borrowing from Star Trek: “We can boldly go where One Person (Jesus) has gone before.”

How do we draw near to God? With Faith. Hebrews says,

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews 10:22

Those in the 1A group tell me it is a complicated, difficult and frustrating experience to get their coronavirus vaccine. They call or drive to different locations. They fill out countless forms. They finally reach the appointment page on the website only to discover the slots are all filled and they have to start the whole process over again. They just can't get in. Friends, when it comes to God, everyone is 1A. Because of Jesus everyone can get in. All you need to do is put your faith in Him,

to enter the Most Holy Place through Him by faith. Don't let fear, pride or guilt hold you back. Draw near to God by Faith in Jesus.

Second, **Hold On to God with Hope.** Hebrews says, "Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" Hebrews 10:23. When we use the word Hope we mean a wish. I hope you will take out the garbage. I hope you will do your homework. Well I'm not going to because I hope there will be a snow day tomorrow. In the Bible, Hope is not a wish. Hope is a solid guarantee of something that will happen. God made a promise He will be with us in this life and we will be with Him in the next life. That is His solid guarantee which He signed not with ink but with His blood. And Hebrews says He is faithful which means He always keeps His promises. He proved He can raise us from the dead by rising from the dead Himself.

Now please notice what He is not promising. He is not guaranteeing everyone will be healed. He is not pledging there will be no war, famine, racism, poverty or pandemic. He is not assuring there will be no sin, sickness or suffering. He is promising He will be with you in all these struggles, He will work through you to overcome these troubles and, most importantly, He is promising these are temporary. They are not eternal. They are not the last word. That especially includes death. We hold onto the Hope that death will one day be decisively defeated.

Why is this crucial? I can count more than twenty five families in our Woodside community who've lost a loved one over the past year. I've offered comfort through phone calls, prayed at bedsides, visited in hospitals and hospices, performed funerals and said goodbye at grave sites. Several of these memorial services are yet to come, waiting for the day when we can all gather openly again. Every family had hope their loved one would be healed and survive. That is what we prayed for. Yet if that is all they hoped for, their hope was empty. Our Hope tells us death is a temporary parting, a momentary separation. The Hope we profess says we will see our loved ones again in our Father's House. The Hope we believe is we will gather for the greatest family reunion of all. Why is it so great? Because nobody will ever have to say goodbye again. A grieving daughter said to me during one phone call, "I just don't know how people without faith get through this." Hold on to Faith in God. Hold on to the Hope that one day you will be with God. Then you will have Hope God is with you in your struggles. So what do we do in the meantime?

Third, **Stir Up One Another to Love.** Hebrews says,

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

Over the last eleven months we've seen how crowds of people on both sides of the spectrum have stirred up one another to rioting, vandalism and violence. The Bible tells us to do the opposite. It says "provoke" one another – not to do bad but to do good, not to hate but to love. Holding onto Hope doesn't mean we focus only on heaven and forget earth. It means we start to live heaven on earth, we start to spread heaven on earth through love and good deeds. We invite others to join us in heaven here on earth so they can receive the faith, hope and love of Jesus.

How do we do this? Together. Hebrews says, 'Do not give up meeting together, as some are in habit of doing, but encourage one another and all the more as you look forward to Jesus'

return.’ Now more than ever, whether in person or online, our Youth Groups, Growth Groups and MicroChurches need to meet together. Now more than ever we need to read and study the Word of God. Now more than ever we need to encourage and build each other up. Now more than ever we need to help each other hold on to the faith and hope of Jesus. If you are not in a Youth Group, Growth Group or MicroChurch, now is the time to join one. You can do that on our Connection Card. If you used to be in a Youth Group, Growth Group, or MicroChurch, don’t fall into the habit of not meeting. Get back together with them. If you’ve been in a Group for a while, why don’t you start a new MicroChurch with two or three friends. And if your Youth Group, Growth Group or MicroChurch has not had anybody new in it for a while, if your Group is focused only on loving each other, if your Group is not engaged in loving and serving others you’re missing the point of your Group. Stir one another up to love and good deeds by:

1. Inviting new people to your group
2. Serving in a mission with your group
3. Starting a new group

Next Sunday, in celebration of Valentines Day we will take a deeper dive into the True Meaning of Love. The following Sunday we will start our series on the Essential for Frontline Workers. Now is a great time to get into a Group, to invite someone to your Group, to start a Group. Whatever you do: do it together – stir each other up to love and do good deeds.

Hans lost all hope in God. Who can blame him. He was devastated by the death of his beloved wife Enid. What is a little surprising is that Hans was a professor in a Theological Seminary. Even strong believers can lose their grip on faith and hope. Hans was so overcome with sorrow he lost his appetite and didn't want to leave the house. So the seminary president and three professors paid Hans a visit. The grieving professor confessed he was struggling with doubt. “I am no longer able to pray to God,” he admitted to his colleagues. "In fact, I am not certain I believe in God anymore.” After a moment of silence, the seminary president said, “Then we will believe for you. We will pray for you.” The four men continued to meet daily for prayer with Hans, asking God to restore the gift of faith and hope to their friend. Some months later, as the four friends gathered for prayer with Hans, Hans stopped them and said, “It is no longer necessary for you to pray for me.” Then, with a smile, he said, “Today I would like you to pray with me.”¹

Who in your life needs a Shot of Hope? If you received one, please pass it on.

¹ William R. White, *Stories for the Journey*