

6-17-2025 “Onward in HOPE!” Central USA Mission Center Reunion

Introduction: Getting Your “But” Out of the Way

Earlier this week we watched a TED talk video with surprising opening line.

AND I have one for you tonight too- so stick with me!

Friends, I’m here to talk about **hope**—but I’m also here to talk about getting your **“but”** out of the way!

You know the one I’m talking about:

- I want to believe God’s working... **but** look at the world.
- I know we’re called to live the blessings of community... **but** people are difficult.
- I want to serve... **but** I’m tired, I’m busy, I’m not sure how.
- I believe all are welcome at Christ’s Table... **but** I don’t want to sit by them.
- I believe God has a future for this world... **but** how will we ever get there?
- I know Christ calls us to community, **but** I can’t make those people come to church.
- I want to work for justice, **but** I don’t want to deal with conflict
- I know other people want to try new things as a congregation, **but** that’s not how we’ve always done it.

Let’s be honest—**we’ve all got some “buts” in the way.**

Take a moment and name the **“buts”** in your head.

What excuses... what obstacles... are you carrying?

Here's the truth: To move Onward in HOPE, we have to be willing as individuals and as a sacred community to TAKE ACTION!

It's time to get our **"buts"** out of the way so we can step fully into God's **preferred future.**

We've talked a lot about hope this week, and here's what we've discovered together-

- Hope is not wishful thinking.
- Hope is not sentimentality.
- Hope is not about ignoring the pain or pretending things are better than they are.

Hope is **courageous imagination.**

Hope is **God's dream for the world.**

Hope is **what we were made for.**

Hope is about having the **courage** to believe that **God has a preferred future**, and it's already breaking in.

Hope Defined: God's Preferred Future

In the theology of hope- especially as taught by theologians like Jürgen Moltmann— hope is the confident expectation and desire for God's preferred future. This future is not merely a wish or possibility, but a reality established by God and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Think of it this way:

- **Hope is rooted in God's promises.** It's trust in God's character and faithfulness.
- **Hope is transformative.** It reshapes us because God's future transforms the whole world.
- **Hope is active, not passive.** Hope calls us to live into God's promises through **healing, reconciliation, and justice** for all of creation, including ourselves.

In essence, hope as God's preferred future means we live with deep confidence that God will fulfill God's promises, even when facing challenging circumstances. It's a hope that knows the reality of suffering but is anchored in faith that God's plan for the future, centered on the resurrection, will ultimately triumph.

So, what does God's preferred future actually *look* like when it shows up in real life? In book *Sharing in Community of Christ*, I think Carina still has some, we find our understanding of salvation, "The gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ: forgiveness of sin, and healing from separation, brokenness, and the power of violence and death. This healing is for individuals, human societies, and all of creation. This new life is a loving gift of God's grace that becomes ours through faith and repentance."

Hope is salvation now—not just someday in heaven, but right here, right now, in real life. Hope looks like:

- A woman finally getting out of a violent home.
- A family who's been hungry, finally sitting at a full table.
- Someone trapped in addiction being *seen* and *loved* into a whole new life.

And I'm not just telling stories—I've seen this hope with my own eyes. I've seen it in many places. In our congregations and outside of them. I've seen it with families in our **Hawthorne Place Ministry**. Families who thought their story was over. And sometimes all they needed was someone to stand next to them and say, *"I see you. I believe in you. You are not alone."*

At Hawthorne this kind of hope has led to baptisms, ordinations, moving out of the complex, restoring broken relationship with extended family, and whole new lives being formed.

This isn't hope in the abstract—it's hope in **action**.

Hope as Prophetic Imagination

In recent years we have been talking more about being a prophetic people, exercising prophetic imagination.

Here's the thing about imagination—we live in someone else's imagination all the time:

- Advertisers are selling you their imagination of what your life should be.
- Governments are selling you their imagination of how the world should be.
- Consumer culture, with its social media influencers, is selling you the imagination that says, *"If you just get more and be like me, you'll be okay."*

But **we are called to live in God's imagination**.

And **God's imagination** for the world looks like swords turned into plowshares, nations learning war no more, and every hungry belly filled. It looks like the oppressed set free, broken relationships healed, and strangers becoming family.

God's imagination is a world where love reigns, where justice rolls down like waters, and where every tear is wiped away. And here's the wildest part—God has chosen *us* to help make it real.

We are called to imagine something better.

Something braver.

Something freer.

Earlier this week when we sang together the hymn the Canticle of Turning, we were embracing the prophetic imagination to bring God's kingdom, God's preferred future, Zion the beautiful, into being.

From the halls of power to the fortress tower, not a stone will be left on stone.

Let the king beware for your justice tears every tyrant from his throne.

The hungry poor shall weep no more, for the food they can never earn;

There are tables spread, every mouth be fed, for the world is about to turn.

That's not just good poetry—that's **prophetic truth**. That's God's preferred future breaking in.

Sometimes I think we have become too comfortable, too entertained, too safe, and too distracted by what we have already have, that we forget our call as disciples.

We must live everyday with prophetic imagination. Remembering who and whose we are. Remembering the stories of faith. Embracing the stories of discipleship, as we take seriously our individual and collective discipleship, honing our skills and all the while inviting others along on this journey with Jesus.

Hope in Action

As we move onward in hope, we face forward, knowing the hard truth:

Hope demands change. Hope demands action.

- To sit comfortably while the world burns around us is not discipleship.
- To protect “what has been” at the expense of “what could be” is not the way of Jesus.
- Jesus was *on the move*, around Galilee, then headed toward Jerusalem — sharing life beyond what religious systems or governments offered.

Hope is movement. **Hope is us, together, standing on our feet, opening our hands, dropping our nets, and going.**

Maybe you’re wondering: Why me? Why would God choose me? I’m nothing special.

You aren’t the first disciple to think that. The words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 ring true for us today:

²⁶ **Look at your situation when you were called**, brothers and sisters! By ordinary human standards not many were wise, not many were powerful, not many were from the upper class. ²⁷ But God chose what the world considers foolish to shame the wise. God chose what the world considers weak to shame the strong. ²⁸ And God chose what the world considers low-class and low-life—what is considered to be nothing—to reduce what is considered to be something to nothing.

God chose you to bring the Peaceable Kingdom into the world. We are pioneers’ folks! Just like the generations before us, sharing a prophetic vision where all are worthy, and are able, all are valued. Our comfort, however, has lulled us to stay in one place too long.

Our moral compass of Love- the life and ministry of Jesus Christ- continues to point us on our way. Let's continue to become more and more like Jesus! Keep moving, sharing love, bringing hope, creating sacred communities where the lost are found.

Doctrine and Covenants

165 3d "Be not consumed with concern about variety in human types and characteristics as you see them. Be passionately concerned about forming inclusive communities of love, oneness, and equality that reveal divine nature."

Let us be that:

Love that shows up when things get hard.

Love that risks.

Love that listens and learns.

Love that gives itself away for others.

Conclusion: The Choice Before Us

So, what is standing in our way?

Is it fear?

Is it comfort?

Is it doubt?

Do we want to be entertained or transformed?

Do we want others to be transformed?

Do we want to play it safe or get swept up in **God's imagination**?

Our hope is in Jesus Christ.

And that hope leads us to **action**, to **community**, to **new creation**.

Let's stop standing around.

Let's move together.

ONWARD IN HOPE!

Amen.