

Portions of Hope: Lessons from the Lead Presbyter

Following my election as Lead Presbyter and Stated Clerk I invited the Presbytery to join a conversation on hope. In previous articles I have reflected on how hope showed up in my interviews with the search committee. I have shared Christ's invitation to abide in hope while exploring what hope means for the Presbytery of West Virginia and its churches. At the Presbytery meeting in February, I affirmed that "we are a Presbytery of hope".

To engage in a conversation on hope, there is a need for a shared or common language of hope. This reminds me of my high school English teacher, Mrs. Weiss. Mrs. Weiss was a fantastic teacher, but her standards were high. In addition to her well known commitment to flunk essays with more than two misspellings (there were dictionaries even before spell check), she did not allow students to define words or concepts using the word in its definition. How do we reflect on hope, build a common language of hope, without using the word hope?

I have been paying attention when I hear the word hope. Hope is everywhere. Many of you are familiar with TED Talks. There is an entire playlist of TED Talk videos about hope. From The Science and Power of Hope by Chan Hellman, a professor at the University of Oklahoma and director of The Hope Research Center, to It All Begins with Hope by Juanita Flowers, founder of a mission-driven cookie company, to 3 Lessons on Hope in Challenging Times by Wajahat Ali, American writer, journalist, public speaker, and "recovering attorney". There is even a collection by Bono, Irish born singer, songwriter, activist, and philanthropist of U2 fame – 8 Talks that Give Me Hope.

According to Google, the word hope appears in the Bible 130 – 180 times, with a "fairly even distribution between the Old and New Testaments". If you dig deeper the number of biblical occurrences may be 360 or 167, or nearly a 100 depending on the translation. The basis of a previous strategic plan for the Presbytery was based on Jeremiah 29:11 that ends with God's words, "to give you a future with hope". The Psalms often reference hope – Psalm 33: 18 or

Psalm 71: 14. Paul writes often in his letters of hope especially in Romans and Thessalonians.

Even a brief entry for hope in a Bible Dictionary, provides a plethora of information on hope including this definition, “in the Bible the expectation of a favorable future under God’s direction”. (Harper’s Bible Dictionary, 1985.)

Far less academic, Google AI offers this definition of hope, “Hope is a positive, active mindset characterized by the confident expectation of a desired, better future, often persisting despite uncertainty or adversity. It involves trust, willpower, and developing pathways to achieve goals, differing from mere optimism by including active anticipation of positive outcomes.” (Google, March 25, 2026.)

As we move into this conversation of hope, we need to build a shared, common language of hope. I believe that the foundation of the common language is that hope is a verb, it is action. It is expectation, it is anticipation. I recently read the novel Truth Be Told by Patricia Raybon. There is a scene in the book where the Rev. Jack Blake preaches about hope, “Down and out? Then hope! Can’t find your way? Then hope! Hit a Brick wall? Then hope! Get knocked down? Then hope! Hope is the one who is hope...Like prayer, we hope with our boots on.” (Tyndall House Publishers, Inc., 2024. Pages 286 and 288.)

I believe that the foundation of a common language is that hope is a verb, it is action. God calls us to hope. Hope actively, hope with the belief that God will be with the people of God. Hope with your boots on.

What will you add to this common language of hope?

To easily find past remarks from our Lead Presbyter, please visit our website, select the communications tab, and then the Portions of Hope: Lessons from the Lead Presbyter tab under Communications.

