

“Reasons to Hope in a Challenging World”

A sermon by Bill Chadwick

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Anyone else occasionally feeling a bit hopeless about the future of the world?

I don't need to remind you of all the reasons to be concerned; the daily news and social media do that every second. But I think many of us do need reminders of how things are getting better in the world and why we, especially as people of faith, should be people of hope. I preached a similar sermon among you two and a half years ago, but we have had 888 days of bad news since then.

I am going to give you twelve reasons for hope, a nice biblical number. But first, let's hear from you. What gives you hope these days? These can be personal things, global things or biblical reasons for hope. Where are you finding hope these days?

Here's why I have hope, though in virtually all of them there is still work to do:

1. Rates of extreme poverty have drastically fallen in recent decades. In 1820 77% of the world's people were unable to meet basic needs (including minimal nutrition and adequately heated shelter), according to prices of locally-available goods and services at the time. In 1950 half of the world's people still lived in extreme poverty. Today that figure is 11%. Poverty is not inevitable, as was believed in the 19th century. It's not inevitable and is, in fact, completely preventable if we simply have the political will. Still, in my lifetime, the rate of extreme poverty has fallen from 50% to 11%. (ourworldindata.org/extreme-poverty-in-brief)
2. It's hard to believe, but fewer people are dying in war today than at any time in human history. In the 1950s—so *after* World War II, 1950—there were almost 250 deaths caused by war per million people. 250 per million. Today that figure is less than ten per million. Four percent of the rate just two generations ago. (Read more: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/globally-deaths-war-and-murder-are-decline-180950237/#Gtq5XaD5000qXFJz.99>)

3. In 1800 12% of the people in the world could read; 1950 50 % literacy; today 86% literacy. And whereas there used to be a huge discrepancy between male and female literacy rates, today there is only a seven-percentage point difference. And we know that as women are educated, especially in developing countries, the family does much better, and the village does much better and the *country* does much better. Huge reason for hope.
4. The violent crime rate in the US is *half* of what it was thirty years ago. (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/191219/reported-violent-crime-rate-in-the-usa-since-1990/>)
5. What about the environment? Lots of reason for concern, but lots of reasons for hope. Let me list eleven:
 - a. The population growth rate has been cut in half since 1980 (<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/world-population-by-year/>) and that will continue to slow as more women in developing countries are educated.
 - b. Recycling of organics is quickly increasing. Organics recycling is critical because the decomposition of organic materials in our landfills produces methane, which cause greenhouse gases.
 - c. A recent study shows that there is only one major conservative political party in the world that still denies the role of humans in climate change. The rest of the world is united in taking action, even conservative political parties. (Reported in *The Guardian*: A paper published in the journal *Politics and Policy* by Sondre Batstrand at the University of Bergen in Norway compared the climate positions of conservative political parties around the world: the USA, UK, Norway, Sweden, Spain, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Germany. He found that the US Republican Party stands alone in its rejection of the need to tackle climate change.)
 - d. The passage of the Legacy Amendment in Minnesota in 2008 has done SO much for the environment... and the arts. One of the greatest things for Minnesota ever!

- e. The rivers in America no longer catch on fire. The Thames River in the UK once again has sharks and seahorses living in it.
- f. Bald eagles are everywhere.
- g. Since the Endangered Species Act was passed, 48 species have been moved from the “endangered” category to the only “threatened” category, and 54 species have been entirely removed from the list. They are no longer endangered.
- h. The proposed copper-sulfide mines near the Boundary Waters have run into major roadblocks.
- i. In 2018 my former congregation, Oak Grove Presbyterian Church in Bloomington, held an Electric Vehicle Expo, to display to the local community electric cars, bikes, lawnmowers, etc. About 70 people attended. They held their third EV Expo this past fall with over 600 people in attendance. By the way, Kris and I are on our second all-electric car, a Nissan Leaf, and our second battery-powered lawn mower, an Eco. And we get our electricity from Xcel Energy’s Windsource, so our carbon footprint is greatly reduced. These things are easily done. If your household has two cars, I highly recommend that one of them be an all-electric. They are now affordable. And you will love it! Terrific acceleration, almost no maintenance, perfectly quiet. I am an evangelist for electric vehicles.
- j. Look at all the car companies that are switching their manufacturing from gas cars to electric vehicles: Jaguar has pledged to be completely electric by 2025, Volvo by 2030, GM by 2035. Completely electric. The US Postal Service next year begins a switchover to all fuel-efficient vehicles. (<https://www.greenmatters.com/p/car-companies-electric-energy-pledge#:~:text=Jaguar%20is%20another%20major%20car%20company%20with%20plans,Rover%20will%20be%2060%20percent%20electric%20by%202030.>)
- k. Tomorrow the Westminster Town Hall Forum will feature Dr. Katharine Hayhoe, chief

scientist for the Nature Conservancy speaking on “The Case for Climate Hope.”

- 1. Of course, the biggest reason for hope regarding the environment is that, on the whole, young people get it. We can’t live the way we have for the past 300 hundred years.
- m. The best thing that you and I can do for the environment is to support efforts to get money out of politics, so the Koch Brothers aren’t a zillion times more influential in Congress than you are. I recommend the Move to Amend organization.

Moving on from the environment...

- 6. The treatment of LGBTQ folks. Again, there is a long way to go, especially in other countries, but just think of how things have changed in the US, just in the past ten years. Astonishing!
- 7. Look at the attention systemic racism is receiving. Again, a long way to go, but contrasted with the situation when I was a kid: segregated schools, drinking fountains, restrooms, everything... Today we have a Black ex-President, we currently have a Black Vice-President, two of the nine US Supreme Court justices are people of color. That’s about to become three. Today, police officers guilty of malfeasance are finally being held accountable. (Listen carefully, I am not making a blanket condemnation of police officers. Four of my favorite people in the world are police officers: kind, compassionate individuals, working to make the world a better place. I am talking about those who do bad things, finally being held accountable, and departments where the system is broken.)
- 8. When I was a kid there was no Americans with Disabilities Act, no handicapped parking, no mandated accessible buildings, no people in wheelchairs seen on TV.
- 9. Treatment of women. Again, a ways to go, but I know that my granddaughters will grow up in a much better world than my sister did, as far as safety, respect and opportunity.

10. Reasons for hope regarding the future of the Church. First, let's look at the Church, capital C. Even before Covid the Church was faced with incredible challenges. About every 500 years the Church has faced cataclysmic societal changes. And we are exactly 500 years out from the Protestant Reformation. We are in a time of great change. The Western Church needs to transform, and it is. I don't know what it will look like in 20 years, but it will be much different than today. But also remember that the Church in much of the world is more vibrant and dynamic than ever.

Here are two reasons why I have hope for the future of the Presbyterian Church (USA). First, each morning as part of my devotion time I read the daily article from our mission agency. I read about the amazing things going on across the globe because of the Presbyterian Church and our mission personnel and dollars. It makes me fall in love with the church anew each morning. I invite you to do the same. Go to presbyterianmission.org.

Second, in 2012 the General Assembly of our denomination determined to form 1001 New Worshipping Communities over the next ten years. Not "churches" necessarily, but "worshipping communities." And they are taking every form imaginable. Primarily they are seeking to make and form new disciples of Jesus Christ, to change and transform the world.

At the end of 2020 there were 529 NWCs. Not surprisingly, people involved in NWCs tend to be much younger and more racially diverse than the denomination at large. Here's a short video of a new worshipping community that started with the help of the congregation in Kansas City that was until recently pastored by Carroll Rock's son, Paul. It's hard to believe he is the same goofball that was in my confirmation class, lo those many years ago. Paul is a terrific pastor, now serving the American Church in Paris.

11. I have hope because of you, and what I see you doing every day, in your vocations, in your volunteer service, you are changing the world. And you are an inspiration!

12. And finally, a story that I am quite sure I have shared with you before, but indulge me.

My mother-in-law, Jean Jacobson, was not a sports fan. She was a sports *fanatic!* She and Reuben for years had season tickets to the Vikings, to Gophers football and basketball. She watched any sport that was on TV. One day when I was at her house, I was flipping through the TV channels and saw that the Minnesota Gophers Men's hockey game was playing, so I decided to watch the conclusion. Soon Jean joined me. It was late in the final period, score tied. With every rush up and down the ice, Jean was on the edge of her seat and yelling at the TV. I also cared who won the game, but I was calm and quiet. With each save by our goalie, Jean let out a big sigh of relief. With each save by the opposing goalie, snarls of disgust erupted. Again, I remained perfectly calm. What was the difference in our attitudes? I knew we were watching a tape... of the game from the night before. I knew that the Gophers won in overtime.

Friends, here's the ultimate reason for hope. The victory was won 2000 years ago. We know the final score: Love wins!