

Sunday, March 3, 2019 – Transfiguration Sunday
“Confident in Hope”

Hebrews 3: 1-6

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Process Structure

Adapted from CJ

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

I love our Hebrews text about confidence. A confidence that doesn't back down in the face of opposition. A courage that shows no fear. A confidence that will accept the danger that goes with the hope we have. A courage to make things just. All because of the hope we have. Standing tall in confidence hope – it inspires, it challenges, it engages us.

Yes, confident hope. But what are we hoping for? Just what is this hope that we stand tall for, with courage and perhaps danger? Our hope is that we will go to be with Jesus when this life ends. We hope with confidence that when our body lies asleep in a grave we will rest with blissful assurance that Jesus will keep us safe.

But hope doesn't stop there. Hope looks forward even further. We are hoping for Jesus to return on the last day – come back and make everything right again. Our confident hope is that on that glorious day our bodies will return to life, transformed in such a way that sickness and pain will never be able to touch us again. On that incredible day, all injustice and evil will be done, creation will rejoice as death and decay will disappear.

Just think, on that day of resurrection, bodies alive once again with taste buds that surprise you with flavors you didn't know were possible; fingertips that feel the wonder of love in holding a hand or touching a face; smells that intoxicate you; sounds touching your ears of music, birds singing, people talking, words that make your heart burst with joy. And our eyes will see colors that make the 128 crayons in that yellow and green box way too few for the beauty of this world recreated to reflect God's glory. This last day resurrection of our bodies and this world is for what we're confidently hoping!

But that confidence is threatened. Confidence stands tall in the face of opposition. Courage means danger is just around the corner. What opposition? What danger?

It's probably no surprise that Christian persecution is most severe in dictatorial or theocratic regimes in countries like North Korea or Iran, or places of chaos and lawlessness like Yemen or Syria. It might surprise you to know that persecution against Christians, including loss of life are quite severe in large democracies like India. China has been cracking down on unregistered churches that don't submit to government intrusion in their teachings. Open Doors USA, an organization that tracks Christian persecution worldwide lists 50 countries as falling into the categories of "High," "Very High" or "Extreme" persecution.

Even in more tolerant societies and places where Christians have historically been influential there are arguments in many quarters about the suitability of faithful Christians to be involved in certain types of work such as doctors, pharmacists, lawyers or judges based on their convictions and beliefs concerning important topics concerning life from conception until death and marriage and family. All the while, we are tempted to sacrifice our care and concern for the poor, marginalized or oppressed, to be dismissive of the bias and blasé about the challenges fellow Christians with non-white skin endure, to harden our hearts against love and care for immigrants, whatever their legal standing or our personal convictions on what wise immigration policy might be.

When we see these attacks on believers, it shakes our confidence. Courage is needed, but standing tall and calling attention to our hopes in Jesus is frightening. "Boast in our hope," the writer of Hebrews says, but it's easier to slink away to the safety of silence, of not making any waves. It's a good thing we don't have to face all those dangers alone. We are never alone in this call to be confident in our hope, courageous in the face of whatever threatens our faith. The writer of Hebrews encourages us to consider Jesus. He wants us to look carefully and think long and hard about Jesus. He wants us to fix our minds on Jesus.

Then he compares Jesus and Moses. Jesus is worthy of greater honor. Moses was just a servant. Jesus is the Son. Moses lived in God's house. Jesus built it. Moses was just a man. Jesus was man and God. Moses died and could lead his people no more. Jesus died and . . . rose again. You'd think with Moses and Elijah, two of the core historical guys from Old Testament Israel it'd be about their life and times – any Hebrew person would love to ask Moses about growing up in Pharaoh's palace, being on the lam after murdering an Egyptian slaver, facing down a new Pharaoh, parting the Red Sea, receiving the Ten Commandments, sitting face to face with God in the tent of meeting. But they're not talking about Moses, or Elijah and His fiery chariot. MOSES is awestruck talking to His Messiah, speaking about Jesus' departure, about God's plan about to happen at Jerusalem. The pecking order is clear – this is all about Jesus.

We are not alone when it comes to confidence and hope. Consider Jesus. Walk up to his empty tomb and look at what he can do. Fix your minds on his glorious body risen from the dead. Our confidence comes from Jesus. Our hope is in Jesus. Think long and hard about what Jesus has done for us and promises to do for us. Stand tall in the hope that only Jesus can give.

But that's not all. The writer of Hebrews also says that Jesus is the builder of a house. The house? It has a firm foundation. It stands against attacks and threats because Jesus builds it. What is this house? The church.

Jesus does not leave us alone. He gives us each other to stand courageous and confident. In other words, "I've got your back." It means you're not facing a threat alone; others are there for you. And you're there for others. We're in this struggle to stay confident and courageous together. We have each other's backs.

In the church, Jesus brings us together to face the threats to our hope and faith. Here he gives us his word to give us confidence and courage for the facing of this life. Here Jesus is present in the Lord's Supper to bring us together as the communion of saints, a family united together in this building called the church, so that we have each other's backs.

I heard a story about a young girl who had lost her hand. She was so self-conscious about her injury and loss that she didn't want to leave her house. Finally, her mother convinced her to go to church. It would be one of her first outings since losing her hand. Her mother called her Sunday school teacher to let her know what was going on. But for some reason the teacher couldn't make it at the last minute and a sub stepped in. She wasn't aware of the young girl's fears and handicap.

During the class, she asked the children to make the church with their hands. You know, you turn your fingers upside down and interlock them and say, "This is the church." Then you raise your index fingers and say, "This is the steeple." Then you open your hands and say, "Here are all the people."

But the girl only had one hand. A boy in the class saw what was happening. He went over to her and gave her his hand. Together they made the church. On this day, that young boy was there for the girl. He had her back. She wasn't there alone.

We're here together. We have each other's backs. We are Jesus's building, his church. He is with us and is our hope, our hope now, when we die, and for that great final day of his return. With that, the writer of Hebrews says, we are people with confidence and courage, boasting of our hope to a world that needs such hope. In Jesus' name, Amen.