

# What Do We Mean When We Say Hope? Apathy, Action, & Whole-Hearted-Ness!

[Amos 5](#) & [Mark 5](#) | Knox-Metropolitan United Church  
Regina, SK | Treaty 4 Territory | July 11, 2021 | Cameron Fraser

---

I remember hearing the Very Rev. Jordan Cantwell, then the 42<sup>nd</sup> Moderator of the United Church of Canada speak about Hope.

Jordan offered the following using the famous adage that optimists see the glass as ½ full while pessimists see the glass as ½ empty.

If optimism means seeing the glass as ½ full.

And if pessimism means seeing the glass as ½ empty.

Hope is another thing all together.

Hope means acknowledging, exactly how much water is in the glass, and how much is not.

Hope is not trying to make a situation seem or feel better than it is - not trying to convince ourselves that there's enough water.

Hope is taking that cup, even if it is almost empty and looking like it will continue to drain, but being so convinced that out there somewhere is more water

Sufficient not only for our own glass

But for the thirst of the world

Hope means that one is moved to action

And one takes one's glass and goes to find the tap!

I've been thinking about Hope lately.

What we might mean when we use that word.

In her short, but powerful book *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, & Wild Possibilities*, activist and author Rebecca Solnit writes this...

*"To hope is to give yourself to the future, and that commitment to the future makes the present inhabitable. Anything could happen, and whether we act or not has everything to do with it...The future is dark, with a darkness as much of the womb as of the grave"*

<https://www.haymarketbooks.org/books/791-hope-in-the-dark>

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2016/03/16/rebecca-solnit-hope-in-the-dark-2/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/15/rebecca-solnit-hope-in-the-dark-new-essay-embrace-unknown>

Hope makes the present uninhabitable.

Hope sees future is dark, with a darkness as much of the womb as of the grave.

Solnit's words powerfully subvert our normal light is good dark is bad language, which is powerfully important as we come to recognize how embedded in systems and ideologies of white supremacy we find ourselves.

We do not know exactly what will happen —but that space of unknown is a space of possibility, out of which and into which we can act to bring about something.

That's hope.

A short while ago I discovered that Jane Goodall hosts a podcast.

She calls it the Hopecast.

<https://janegoodall.ca/the-hopecast-jane-goodalls-podcast/>

In a recent episode she was in conversation with Dr. Elizabeth Ayana Johnson who herself is the Host of the podcast *How To Save a Planet*.

<https://gimletmedia.com/shows/howtosaveaplanet>

They spoke about hope, action, inaction, apathy, and wholehearted commitment.

And how there is a complicated relationship between these ideas.

How sometimes what is called hope feels more like optimism mixed with inaction.

These ideas provide an interesting lens through which to ponder our readings.

We began by hearing from the prophet Amos who is speaking to the Kingdom of Israel in and around the 8<sup>th</sup> Century Before the Common Era.

It is a time of community break down.

The call to love neighbour, care for the marginalized, practice Shalom and Jubilee, and embody an economic ethic of Sabbath has been forgotten by wealthy.

The fact that there is even a division between the wealthy and poor itself speaks to the issue.

The economic ethic of Torah calls for restraint and warns against accumulation, and Jubilee is meant to ensure that neither poverty nor wealth becomes inherited.

Yet here they are.

The poor at the gates call for justice while the rich deride and ignore them.

It is sadly a dynamic that will continue in human societies, our own included.

How often do the comfortable whose comfort is structured through the marginalization of the marginalized point to the problem being the cries of those who call for justice, and the way those cries disturb or inconvenience.

How this becomes the issue, not the uninhabitable conditions in which the poor, and other ways marginalized are forced to live.

We might name any other number of issues here.

Calls for racial justice

Reconciliation and reparation

Accessibility

Inclusion and Affirmation

The Global South and marginalized Indigenous communities raising alarm at the way the climate change is immediately impacting their health and well-being.

Or, very front of mind today, the call for fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

<https://united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/covid-19-global-response>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOWEJ0B9-RI>

Perhaps you would name something else.

The book of Amos offers us a model for naming a present that is, in so many ways

To use Solnit's words

Uninhabitable given these conditions.

And coming to a place in which we name such conditions as unacceptable

Is part of hope

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote about the Hebrew Prophets like Amos

About how they were haunted by the realities that they faced

How they somehow found within the fortitude not to ignore and rationalize

But to allow the disparity between the beauty of God's Shalom

And the reality of a moment in which, to use Amos' words, the poor are trampled and the rich take from the grain levies to increase their own abundance.

This is the space in which Hope works.

The space between despair and inaction and apathetic ignoring of the cries of suffering and an abdication of response-ability.

And isn't this the call to the spiritual practice

To make the space within

The heart and the mind

To touch the deeper call of the soul

What the Apostle Paul speaks of as the Christ within

What Quakers calls the Inner Teacher?

That space where our wholeness and sureness, our connectivity dwells, our creative divine image churns with passion and possibility.

Making space for this to emerge, to come to the forefront.

The Book of Amos was, as many will know, a favourite of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Whose version of hope began with a recognition that the reality in which he dwelt was unacceptable which lead him to such memorable turns of phrase as:

*With Love, we can make of this old world a new one.*

<https://time.com/5283768/michael-curry-royal-wedding-martin-luther-king/>

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/vision-world-made-new>

Our Gospel reading embodies this active hope as well.

A woman who has been suffering for 12 years and a 12-year-old girl lying in bed near death.

The author and composer of the Book of Mark is doing something interesting here.

You see the repetition of 12?

12 is of course the number of tribes of Israel.

This is more than just a miraculous healing narrative.

But a glimpse into the mission of the Jesus of Mark's Gospel.

The healing of his nation.

A nation torn apart under Roman colonialism and the social stratification of elite and peasantry, rich and poor, just like in the days of Amos.

These healings are about Hope.

Written to a people who are stuck.

They are a call to action.

To join in the healing of their people.

To grab their cups, not matter how full, or how empty and go looking for water.

To continue, no matter how often they are (to use Amos' words) derided at the city gate, to lift up their voices calling for the justice that will run down like a rushing stream.

[https://leaderpost.com/news/saskatchewan/youre-really-left-behind-internet-divide-creates-barriers-for-those-in-poverty?fbclid=IwAR3T7WqWPLVavtmS8dUQhswJbVf\\_2NYn4kQkY5tbafiJcXlf67E3s\\_lhyw](https://leaderpost.com/news/saskatchewan/youre-really-left-behind-internet-divide-creates-barriers-for-those-in-poverty?fbclid=IwAR3T7WqWPLVavtmS8dUQhswJbVf_2NYn4kQkY5tbafiJcXlf67E3s_lhyw)

<https://www.facebook.com/reginaantipoverty>

Earlier this week, our friends at the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry were part of a story in the Regina Leader-Post about how the inadequate supports of SIS The Saskatchewan Income Support leaves people further and further behind.

It is voices like theirs today who call to us like Amos', like the woman who would not be deterred to reach through the throng of bodies towards her potential healing, like Jesus who would not be stopped by the mocking crowd who thought him un-realistically optimistic.

The challenge with so much of this stuff, for Amos' and Jesus moment included, is what Theologian of Climate Change (yup, Theologian of Climate Change) Michael S. Northcott calls *a slow catastrophe*.

<https://radicaldiscipleship.net/2019/01/11/nature-against-empire/#more-15338>

Social supports are not cut in one fell swoop, neither in Amos' time, nor ours.

Which can make it harder to recognize the significance.

A little bit here and there, and reorganization, and reorientation.

A global temperature rise of a degree.

The Prophetic Imagination of Dr. Elizabeth Ayana Johnson and Jane Goodall, of the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry, of the Prophet Amos, and the Gospel of Mark is therefore in part about challenging us who get focused on the moment, to take a step back and see anew what has been lost or created, and how it is not the little thing we might have thought, but part of a greater whole whose consequences are more detrimental and damaging that we may have imagined.

It is our inclination as the reader, to long to find ourselves in the text as the ones working for justice, the ones who get it.

But perhaps, we do well to see ourselves as Amos' audience for a little bit.

Perhaps we do well to see ourselves in the crowd who surround Jesus blocking the one longing for healing.

Not necessarily out of malevolence, but in our own unseeing.

Perhaps the grace in the text to us today is that if we listen we can hear the Amos' and the ones longing for healing, telling us the truth about our moment.

It might be hard to hear.

But with the spirituality that allows us to make the space to listen and not rush to justify,

We might find that we can develop response-ability and take responsibility.

That we might hear just how much a thirst is out there.

That we might hear precisely where it is.

And begin to bring our creativity together – move from charity to solidarity.

And grab our cups and go find the tap!