The 2010 Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture † Hope

Introduction

Hope. It's a catchphrase on our bumper stickers. It's a buzzword on the lips of our leaders. It's the youth sitting in our churches and the futures we dream for them, but still we ask: what is Hope? We see the word everywhere from ad campaigns to refrigerator magnets, but in an era of constant war, unending poverty, and pervasive indifference, we want to know: where can we find Hope?

The 2010 Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture explore the radical theological and missional significance of Hope and the practical implications for our youth ministries. These lectures look at Christian Hope through the eyes of two current practical theologians and educators, a world-renowned university minister and author, and an ordinary radical.

The hope in the world, ubiquitous though it might seem, may be running out, but we do not despair. Because it's also the journey of the cross. It's the mystery of the empty tomb. It's the God who stands in the gap of a broken world and holds us in a divine embrace as we pray, "Our Hope, Lord, is in you."

The Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture are designed to foster original scholarship pertaining to youth and the contemporary church. The lectures are delivered as a series at the Princeton Forums on Youth Ministry and are published annually. Lecturers include scholars who are not directly involved in the practice or study of youth ministry but who can bring the fruits of their respective disciplines to bear on ministry with the young. May these lectures inspire you in your ministry with young people.

Faithfully,

Dayle Gillespie Rounds
Director, Institute for Youth Ministry
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2010 Lectures

Kenda Creasy Dean	"Ascension Deficit Disorder: Youth Ministry as Laboratory for Hope"
Rodger Nishioka	"The Uniqueness of Christian Hope" "Hope as Cruciform"
The Reverend Peter J. Gomes	"The Christian Hope for a New Generation"
Shane Claiborne	"Becoming the Church We Dream Of"

The Christian Hope for a New Generation † The Reverend Peter J. Gomes

I titled this talk, "The Christian Hope for a New Generation." I don't think that's too ambitious or presumptuous a topic for you to consider in your conference, and the question with which you and I are dealing with all the time is this: What do we say to those who say that the world is in a hopeless state and that the rising generation is one without hope? We hear this over and over again. What do we say to those who make such statements, even if they include ourselves? Well, there are many places where one might begin. First, as Christians, we remind ourselves, and others, that we are children of hope, and I'll come back to that. Second, we remind ourselves that the good news, the gospel, is hope for us, and I'll come back to that as well. Third, we trust that in God's future, things will be better than they are now, and I'll also come back to that. We recognize, as we should, that hope is hard work, and I certainly will come back to that.

I begin with a quote from a leading Roman Catholic theologian of the last generation, Joseph Cardinal Suenens, who said: "I am a man of hope, not for human reasons, nor from any natural optimism, but because I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in the church and in the world, even when his name remains unheard."

What an extraordinary claim to be able to make. It is brave for us to make this claim because most of us are still in the business of placing our hope, such as it is, on a natural and rational basis. We look around and see sensible signs of hope, at least we hope we do, and we become hopeful because of them, or some of us may be natural optimists. We suspect that if we wait long enough, everything will turn out all right, and that, since we are on the right side to begin with, we just have to be patient.

That's the kind of hope with which so many of us were brought up, and it's the kind of hope that characterizes my least favorite liturgical season: Advent. What do we do in those four weeks? When I first hear the tinny singing of Christmas carols, and see both the Santa Claus stuffed in the window of Sears, Roebuck, and all the fake Christmas packages, I know that Thanksgiving cannot be far away and, alas, I also know that, as sure as day follows night, Advent follows Thanksgiving. What was I, a minister of Word and Sacrament in the church of Jesus Christ, to do yet again with the season dubbed the "season of hope?" We light the candles on the wreath, we go through all the liturgical changes, we sing the hymns, we talk about light and hope, and yet we all know that things are pretty much the same as they were the previous Advent, and will be the next Advent as well. It's a very hard sell.

Little children understand the paradox and want to know what it's all about. I delight in listening to their church school teachers try to explain it, for it's not an easy task and cheap hope is at every hand. We somehow hope that things will get better, that we will get better, and that the season will do something for us; yet, it very rarely does. We slouch toward Bethlehem depressed, cynical, and worn out. By comparison, Lent is a wonderful release, for we don't expect much of Lent except destruction and death, and it never disappoints. Advent, however: what do we do with that? Thus, when I hear a great Roman Catholic theologian say, "I am a man of hope, not for human reasons, nor from any natural optimism, but because I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in the church and in the world, even when his name remains unheard," that gives me confidence. He has put it, as most Roman Catholic theologians do, in better language than I could.

The reason I am a Christian today is that, contrary to all the evidence, I remain hopeful and confident that the reign of Jesus Christ will last forever and that the promises are true, and I am willing to endure anything because I believe that God's will will prevail.

Now, I may not live to see it. I may not be a part of it. And I may inhibit it in some way or another, but that it will prevail I have no doubt. So I say my prayers, I preach my sermons, I teach my classes, and I go to church, not because these activities alone reassure me, for sometimes they do not. Sometimes they are very disconcerting, especially the going-to-church part. Yet my confidence is in the fact that Jesus Christ is greater than the church and that God's will and reign do not depend on you or on me. Somehow these things will come to pass, and through some quite remarkable agency that we call the Holy Spirit, we will become what we are meant to be. The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord, and the things for which we work and pray will, in the fullness of time, become the order of the day.

If I didn't believe that with all my heart, let me reassure you that there are easier ways to make a living than being a minister, easier ways to make a living than the ways most of you have chosen, easier things to believe in and hope for, but with that conviction I can handle almost anything and anybody. As the old hymn goes, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." That's very old-fashioned. That's what your grandmother would say, and that is what your uncle would sing, but it's no less true, and it is very helpful to me. I wonder if it would not be very helpful to the young committed to our care. How do we know?

One thing I have had in recent years is many questions from my students about the Book of Revelation. When is the last time you dipped into the Book of Revelation for devotional exercises? The general opinion is that it is a book of doom, gloom, and destruction, and is rightly at the end of the Bible. There are people who have made a career out of the gloom and doom of the Book of Revelation, and most of them are on television stations radiating out of Texas. I don't understand why they are so depressed down there, but they must be depressed, because my reading of the Book of Revelation is that the chapter on the new Jerusalem, the new heaven, and the new earth trumps everything else. It's a great way to end. There is something to look forward to, something to hope for. I think of the Book of Revelation as God's second chance with us. I'm not going to comment on whether God makes mistakes or not, which I would never do, especially here at Princeton; I can feel the fires burning around my ankles now, even thinking such a heretical thought.

Somehow, however, if God didn't get it quite right the first time, the Book of Revelation suggests that it's going to be different the next time. I am encouraged by that book; I'm excited by it! I take pleasure in it, for it reminds me that the fuel of the future is hope. To remind young people that the fuel of the future is hope is to do them an important service, and it is one of the causes to which I am committed. Sometimes the message seems lost, particularly to the young people, and part of that has to do with the fact that we have failed to translate to them the essential good news of the gospel. Take a young person coming to church on any given Sunday and put that young person where I stand in the pulpit. Have him survey a crowd such as you: grim faces, unhappy-looking people, brows furrowed, arms folded, a sense of "You've got nothing to tell me that I haven't already heard a hundred times." I'll preach on the Prodigal Son: "Oh God, not that again!" I will say that Jesus has risen from the dead: "Any other news?" The message is not grabbing their attention, and young people are usually smarter than we are. They can ask and answer our questions before we can formulate them and that's part of the hard work of being a youth minister, dealing with people smarter than we are.

That's one of the joys I derive from teaching at Harvard. All my students are smarter than I am. I know it. They know it, and they don't mind letting me know that they know. One thing is different, however; they are smarter than I am, but I know more than they do, and by the time they catch up with knowing what I know, we graduate them and get rid of them and start all over again. It's a foolproof formula, so assume you can do it in your little church too. Figure it out. We do know more than they know, and we know that the essence of the gospel is confidence in the future, because we know who holds

the future. We know that it is not just a collection of destinies, chances, accidents, or even policies. We know that at the heart of what we understand is to be faithful, Christian believers.

Hope, Christian hope, is not just wishful thinking, and if we are able to communicate that to these wonderfully critical young people with whom we are spending our days, we will have done them a very great service. I fear, though, that we haven't yet done that great service, and there may be a number of reasons why. One of them is that perhaps we are tired of telling the story. We have told it over and over again. We have heard it from our own youth, and it's hard to get excited again about telling the story. But, I tell you, if we don't tell that story and we don't tell it in communicative, effective ways, and if the new generation doesn't learn or know that story, it will be a very sad day for the faith. Before I go on much further, I wish to say that there is no new hope. I have not come up with a new secret device or a whole new content of the gospel, and if you have filled this chapel and opened your notebooks with a hope that I am going to tell you something new, I am going to disappoint you straight away.

I am a collector of antiques, and when I go into an antiques shop and see a sign that says "Nothing New Here," I am reassured. I am hoping that you might be reassured to realize that there is nothing new here either. It is the same old, same old, and what worked of old must work again. We are the custodians of that remarkable hope. There is no new hope, only the old one. There is no new technique, only the old one. It would be wonderful if we could find a way to tell a new story in a new way, or an old story in a new way, and I've watched people try. I've watched many devices unfold, but somehow there is nothing that surpasses old-fashioned witness and testimony. That's what we do, and that's what young people, I have discovered, take seriously. They want to know. What is your story? Why are you connected with this? Don't give me some abstract principle. Don't tie me to some inevitable historical motion. Why are you engaged in this work? What has it done for you? What have you to tell me that it will do for me? That process has not changed since Jesus's day, and if we have forgotten how to do it, or choose not to do it, it's no wonder that the young do not hear it, do not act upon it, and do not take us as seriously as we might like.

Telling a story is a part of the enterprise. And telling the story to new people is to remind them that, at every stage of any significant moment of life on this earth, the story has been of the triumph of hope over experience. That is what they learn in the story of the Jews; ask any Jew, and he will tell you. That is the story of African Americans; ask any of our older people in this country and they will tell you that they have lived to see with their own eyes the triumph of hope over experience, and that it is a principle that can be tried, tested, and observed throughout the world. It is at the heart of our Christian faith; it is what we call the gospel, the good news. I'm often asked how I define the good news, and I have a very simple definition: "The good news is that things do not always have to be as they appear to be." That, for me, is good news. I don't have to be forever what I appear to be; you don't have to be forever what you appear to be, we don't have to be stuck where we are forever. There is infinite possibility, and that possibility has to do with transformation, that we become what God intended us to become. Don't you sometimes wonder, given your talents, your skills, your personality, your limitations, what God really has in mind for you? Who messed it up, God or us? What is going to be done about it? I find that when I ask young people what they think they are meant to be and do, the world opens up and they take the question very seriously, largely because they don't know, and largely because they are very interested. If it is somehow connected with the Christian faith, and generations of people very much like themselves have asked the same questions before them, my experience has been that they are willing to listen. They are willing to try any port in a storm, even a Christian port. And, if we are able to communicate it, we have no idea what wonders might occur. So, telling the story is a very important thing, and remembering to tell the story is at the heart of our ministry.

Now, I suggest that youth ministry sometimes suffers under at least two misconceptions. One is that the Christian story is too hard or too difficult to tell to young people. How will they absorb it all? How will they deal with it? I know churches that work very hard to make Holy Week nice for kids. How do you make Holy Week nice? It's not a nice week. I mean,

there is very little you can do to sort of cheer it up, make it palatable, and we worry whether our kids will be damaged psychologically if they deal with the heavy grimness of Holy Week. Let's skip from Palm Sunday to Easter, we think, and hope they don't notice anything is missing. We know that this is true not only for young people but for adults, but that's another story in a lecture of another sort. We sometimes think that the story is too hard for children to comprehend, forgetting that these are the same kids who fix all of our electronic devices, who watch and understand the most complex movies available, and who multi-task as a daily order of business. Is the Christian story too hard for them to comprehend? They are capable of comprehending anything we are capable of communicating, and that's a fact that we must understand.

I had a student, I wish he were a Princeton student but I am afraid he was a Harvard student, who asked me the difference between the Eucharist and the Eschaton. There isn't any, but there were three responses, and I was grateful for the theological question. What is the difference between the Eschaton and the Eucharist? I should have been grateful that it was a question I could answer, but I was horrified at an evident failure in instruction to such an ignorant student soon to be foisted upon the churches. Oh, dear, what could we do about that? We tried to answer the question. The conclusion, from my point of view, is that they don't know much. They really don't, not as much as we think they know, and we have much to tell, more than we think.

In a strange sort of way, as I look back at my somewhat difficult experience with youth leaders in my church, I feel that I had a strange love/hate relationship with them, for I didn't like them; they weren't likeable. It wasn't that they came from Andover-Newton, it was just that they weren't likeable, and yet they had something that I wanted and I didn't know quite what it was. I admired them in a strange kind of way, I looked up to them, and I wanted them to do something with me, to me, for me, that my very attitude and behavior almost prevented. I wanted them to tell me about Jesus, but they were too sophisticated for that, and they thought I was too sophisticated, so we talked about all sorts of worldly things but we never got around to that strange and curious matter of piety. I was interested for a short while in that and hoped that these people from Andover-Newton would talk a little bit about it, but they didn't. They lost their shot, and I went on to other things.

I wanted to know something about the magic of the Christian faith. I think they were much more interested in whether developing a Christian's faith made sense. It didn't make any sense to me. I knew things that made sense, but the Christian faith didn't make a great deal of sense, and that's why it was interesting and sort of compelling. This whole strange collection of stories, actions, and attitudes that made such a difference, yet didn't make as much sense as an average television western. I wanted to know about that, but my youth leaders, I think, were unwilling to risk the chance that they might appear to be nonsensical in communicating things that wouldn't impress me. When I say "telling the story," I mean telling the story in all of its wonderful complexities, not trying to explain everything away.

When people come to The Memorial Church on Christmas Eve and on Easter Day, I always say, "If you have come for an explanation this evening, or this morning, and you want me to explain the virgin birth, or the stone rolled away from the grave, you are in the wrong place. Why don't you leave now? Leave the seat for somebody else, and we will get on with it." The hymn says, "O, come let us adore him;" it doesn't say, "O, come let us get the story straight, let us dissect him." It doesn't say that at all. There are other settings in which to have that discussion, but worship is not one of them, which is news to some people. Very few people leave, I'm happy to tell you, because they think it is a gimmick and that there really is an explanation that I'm going to give to a select few after they have left, so they stay. You may want to use that in your own churches, and good luck to you; it works for me!

Perhaps we should realize when we deal with the young that we should approach youth ministry in the way our predecessors approached the whole missionary endeavor. I don't know where Princeton Theological Seminary stands on missions. I grew up in a missionary-emphasized world. My pastor had been a missionary in Burma before the Second

World War, and he wept regularly when our little church didn't give as much to missions as he thought it should. My colleague Gordon Kaufman, now retired, once likened campus ministry to a mission field, and I'm thinking maybe that that is one of the ways we should look at young people. Here is a great field, white unto harvest, where there is little natural knowledge, and a strong pervasive culture largely at odds with whatever it is we have to offer. If we were in Burma, or Thailand, or Japan, how would we approach these people with the gospel?

In some sense, that is very much the case with young people, except it is worse that they have inherited some stereotypes and preconceptions that will be very hard to dislodge or shake. Yet, if we look upon them as people who stand in need of what we may have to offer, it might make a difference in the way that we offer it. I just pose that as a suggestion. They are a whole people. They are a needy people. They are a mighty people, and they are a people to whom we have access. How then should we appeal to them? How do we begin? What do we have to say?

I don't know a great deal about the missionary movement, but I do know that when the missionaries began, they approached the people with whom they were working by saying, "We have something very important and precious to offer you that works for us, and let us tell you about it." They don't begin by saying, at least not any more, "This is what is wrong with what you do. This is what is wrong with you." They begin by saying, "Let me tell you what has been working well for me and why I want to share it with you." This could be a novel way of dealing with the phenomenon of hope among young people.

In my book *The Good Life: Truths That Last in Times of Need*, which I wrote several years ago and neglected to urge you to buy for this session, I have a chapter on hope, with its subtitle "*Unreasonable and Indispensable*," and if any of you wants to know about what I think on that subject, I suggest you buy or steal the book, and read the chapter. I began with that wonderful phrase of Paul, from Romans, where he says, "We are saved by hope, but hope that is seeing is not hope, for what a man sees, why doth he yet hope for?" That's paradoxical enough to entertain and entrance the most avid Harry Potter student. There is something about hope that is not seen that makes it real. How do we communicate that to people who are desperate for hope? My experience in dealing with Harvard students is they are desperate for something worth hoping for, desperate for something worth believing in, desperate for something worth giving their lives to. Sometimes they think that is to be found on Wall Street, but we've all learned a bitter lesson about that. Sometimes they think it's in public service, and sometimes they think it is in the sanctity of the family and the home, but when all is said and done, they are still looking for that in which to invest all of their energies. That is why they come to church. That is why they take Bible classes; that is why they come to see me, and any of the other twenty-nine chaplains in the university. They are desperate for something worthwhile in which to hope. When you can communicate to them that it is worthwhile to hope in Jesus, it is worthwhile to hope in the Christian faith for all eternity for here is something to consume every fiber of your body and mind, then some of them will give it a chance. Some of them will listen. "We are saved by hope," Paul says, "but hope that is seen is not hope but what a man seeth, why doth he hope for it?" There has to be something other than that which you can put your finger on.

G.K. Chesterton, that wonderful cynic of the last century, put it very well for me when he said: "As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is a mere flattery or platitude. It is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a thought at all. Like all the Christian virtues, it is as unreasonable as it is indispensable." Only when the situation is hopeless does hope begin to manifest itself. And many of our young people find themselves in what they perceive as a hopeless dilemma, whether it's in the family, in school, in the workplace, or in a sense of a world out of control. They understand hopelessness and they say, "Well, what good will this do; what good will that do?" It is only at that point that genuine hope becomes the means by which we get from present hopelessness to future promise, and if hope is understood as that engine, my guess is that we will have a lot of takers, for they are hurting. I see it on every hand. I see the desire to overcome the present state of helplessness and hopelessness. I see a desire to move forward. It is an inarticulate desire, but I see it. The great question is what it is that

they want. What do young people want? Well, who really knows what they want? My experience is very limited and I do not offer it as normative, but I do know what I have observed.

I've had the great privilege of bringing famous people to a famous place. We've had Mother Teresa. We've had Daddy King. We've had Nelson Mandela. We've had them all. And what's more, we've had an enormous student response to each of them and, surprising to me, not because they were celebrities, but because they were profiles in hope. Each of them represented the triumph of hope over experience, and I heard this from students who are surrounded by famous people all the time, that these guests to Harvard were famous not because they were famous but because they represented something of this ineluctable thing called hope. One boy said to Nelson Mandela, "How can I get me some of that?" He understood that there was something there that he wanted here. The Mandela convocation was an extraordinary moment, with Harvard Yard as filled as it is on commencement day, but with something palpably different. I asked a student what he thought was different about it and he replied that it wasn't about him or about us; it was about what he believed in. That was what made it different. That was very instructive for this old minister. He recognized that there was something here, the interior workings of President Mandela's soul, that made a difference, and he wanted a piece of it, a part of it. What must I do to get that?

We try to communicate that hope is a future enterprise. That somehow flies in the face of the culture in which we find ourselves today, for so much of what we do in the church is backward and retrospective. Young people believe only what we tell them, and we seem to tell them that the only viable faith is long ago and far away. The only way to do things is the way their grandparents did them, and the old notion of revival has to do with calling up something that once was there and is now gone, and if we do the right thing we can get something of it back. I know here, too, that that's a dangerous thing to say, and it's fair to say that Princeton has more revivals than Harvard, which is probably good, for you needed them, I'm sure. There is in our culture, especially in our religious culture, a whole notion that faith was played out in the past, and there is a certain comfort to that. I watch young people try to construct nineteenth-century lives for twenty-first century living, and they can't do it, for that was a different world, a different era, and a different ethos. The truth is the same, but the application is not the same. If we are able to persuade young people that faith is a future enterprise for them, something yet to be discovered, yet to be experienced, that the world awaits a moment of ignition in faith and not simply a recreation of something in the nineteenth century, we will have again done them a great service.

By that I don't mean introducing happy-clappy worship services and hymns that don't scan, and doing nothing that wasn't done before; I don't mean that at all. I'm a very conservative fellow as far as that sort of thing is concerned, but I want to say to them that what was true for our fathers and mothers will be true for you and is true for you, but the field to be conquered is out there, not back there. I am trained as a historian, and I am often asked by people in which, of all the ages in history, I would most like to be, whether walking with Jesus in Galilee, or living in medieval Europe, in Puritan New England, or in the era of the nineteenth century, etc., etc., and I answer that there is no place in the past that I want to be.

I had a great old friend who was born in the last decade of the nineteenth century, lived through the entire twentieth-century, and died in his right mind in 2002. I remember saying to him, just close to his birthday, "Well, Norman, of the three centuries in which you have lived, which do you like the most?" and he responded, "The one I'm in." That's my view, too. There is no period back there where we will find comfort and consolation. Young people do not have to become clones of an earlier age or of a different generation to know the power of hope in the world, and neither do you or I. Somehow, claiming the future is to me the great work of hope, and if you can get young people interested in claiming the future, and I don't know a single young person who doesn't feel that he has a purchase of some sort or another on the future, then we will be able to speak to them of the Christian hope, for there is no period in the past where that Christian hope has been achieved or fulfilled. Every age has its problems, every age has fallen short of the glory of God, and so the work remains and each new generation has a chance to give it a try, another bite of the apple as it were; and if we are able to persuade young people that they have a chance at this, we have a chance of engaging them in the ongoing work of the church.

Hope is a future enterprise, and it is not Paradise Lost but Paradise Regained that should interest us. It's not the way it used to be, and that is probably pretty good. One way of capturing young people's imaginations on the subject of hope, I have discovered, is to ask them what they hope for. What is the biggest hope you have for your wife, your husband, your children, yourself? What do you really hope for? What do you hope for this whole world? What do you hope for this country? That gets the juices flowing, and I constantly remind them that hope without work is a useless enterprise. That's one of the problems with Advent: all talk about hope and no work. It's all talk about hope and no charity, no benefaction, no engagement. We have to put those two back together again if Advent is going to be redeemed. What is the vision that will sustain the future?

There are many worldly, wise people who used to make fun of George H.W. Bush because of his "vision thing," and I give him credit for that—one of the few things for which I will give him credit, but I give him credit for that. People laugh at President Obama because of the idealism, the naiveté, and the vision thing, but it is so nice to have something of that somewhere in our public life. What is the vision thing that we share with our young people? We have a pretty clear and concrete vision thing: it is called the gospel, and we should be as articulate as we can about it.

Hope is indeed the fuel of the future. We don't get to the future, or to a future worth getting to, without it. If we have it, that is to say, if we have that hope, it will make all the difference. What do you hope for? Do you hope for more of the status quo? Because if you do, that will not do; the status quo is not up to the mark. Do you hope for the good old days, the days before yesterday? Every time you take up a church, those of you who are going into ordained pastoral ministry, somebody in that church is going to say, "Oh, in Doc So-and-So's day, Sunday school was full, we had two services on Sunday, and the mid-week meeting had lots of people at it." All of that, by implication, is that you are a loser and it's going to get worse. There is the desire for the "good old days."

It used to be our responsibility to try to retain what once was lost, but I suggest that we are in a new mode, a new adventure, and we're not trying to regain that which was lost. We're trying to regain, rekindle, that which once made all the difference, that which set the hearts of men and women aflame. That was what made it worth living for, and worth dying for.

Resurrection is a chance at a new life. Our resurrection is that it is not an old life that is brought back; it's a new life, a new chance, a new opportunity. It is not more of the same. Can we encourage the young to think this way? Will they think this way if they see us thinking this way? This is not a new message, I know that as well as any of you, and for those of you who were hoping for a new message, I'm sorry that you didn't get your money's worth. It is not a new message, but it's an old message that desperately needs to be heard, and I will testify that I believe it will be heard by this current generation. They've been given so much nonsense, so many nostrums, and so many false hopes; why can't we try to give them the real thing? My bet is that they will hear it and receive it gladly. We look at the heart of our faith in the time to come, and we work for it as a new age. I remember, in our little Baptist church in Plymouth, on the first Sunday of the month when we had communion, it was a very solemn sort of thing and I didn't understand what was fully going on, but I was there. The words of the institution were read out, and then the minister would say, "We do eat this bread and drink this cup till he come." I didn't quite know what that meant, but as I grew older I understood that this commemoration, which we Baptists are very keen on, had a future-driven enterprise: "Till he come." That meant that we weren't just play-acting, we were investing in a cause with drama that we believed we had some hand in bringing to pass, and that made all the difference. That was exciting, and it continues to move me very much to this very day.

I hadn't any sort of connection to the communion because it was so holy and so secret in our church, and little people like myself weren't allowed to receive it. No one said so, but it just wasn't done. My curiosity got the better of me one Sunday, however, and when the little tray of juice cups was passed, I took one, and then the little plate of bread came by and I took a piece. I was the only kid in the whole church, but that didn't trouble me. At home that day during Sunday lunch,

when my parents asked, as they did every Sunday, "What did you do in Sunday school?" I stupidly replied, "I didn't stay in Sunday school, I took communion instead." Well, there was a deadly silence, and my mother—I was the apple of her eye—became coldly silent and I knew something was awry. Father was not a churchman at that point so he didn't know what was going on, but Mother said, "Do you know what St. Paul said about our taking on unworthily?" I vaguely remembered that St. Paul had said that it wasn't very nice, and my mother looked at me and said, "My dear boy, you must never do that again." I was terrified, and my father said, "What's the matter?" My mother answered, "He has put his soul in jeopardy." Now, these were Baptists, not Roman Catholics or Greek Orthodox, and I never did that again, and it is amazing that I am a Christian today. That was the ambiguous side, but the unambiguous side of it was that there was a future in which we could partake, and I was partaking in it.

We look forward to the time to come because we know that there is a great deal of work to be done in it. We work in it; we work for it. Work is what we do. Work is how a Christian translates this abstract hope into something that is real, that is not weak, that is not cheap, but that is very much a part of the fabric of our faith. It makes the difference between hope and wishful thinking. I am reminded of this every time we sing, "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," the Negro national anthem, which is not the easiest song in the world to sing, but I remember the story of James Weldon Johnson and his brother, who wrote it in Florida in 1900 for Negro History Week. Being black in Florida in 1900 was no easy thing, and yet they wrote this uplifting song. "Facing the rising sun of our new day begun/let us march on 'til victory is won…" and people did. We became what we hoped for, and that is the trick, becoming what we hope for. If we could persuade young people that becoming what they hope for is a worthwhile enterprise and that what they hope for should be worthwhile in the gospel, we would get their attention and do tremendous things.

The work of hope has to be provided and has to be our work. I end with a poem that I was taught in junior high school, which was written in New York at the beginning of the twentieth century when, for many Christian leaders, the world was going to hell in a handbasket with the sweatshops, the malefactors of great wealth, and all of the terrible things that corrupted urban America. The minister of the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York, Maltbie Davenport Babcock, wrote a hymn, and for some reason or another it became popular in our public schools in Plymouth and we were required to memorize it. I still remember it, and those of you who have a Methodist hymnal are lucky still to have it in your book. It's called, "Be Strong!"

Be Strong!
We are not here to play, to dream, to drift;
We have hard work to do and loads to lift;
Shun not the struggle – face it, 'tis God's gift.

The next verse is even worse!

Be Strong!
Say not, "The days are evil, who's to blame?"
And fold the hands and acquiesce – oh shame!
Stand up, speak out, and bravely, in God's name.

Be Strong!
It matters not how deep entrenched the wrong,
How hard the battle goes, the day how long;
Faint not—fight on! Tomorrow comes the song.

—Maltbie Davenport Babcock

Think of saying that every day in a public school and actually believing in it. In my moments of weakness and anxiety, of which there are many these days, I still recite that poem. It makes all the difference in the world, and it, and something like it, can make all the difference in the young people committed to our care. In that, there is great hope, and my great hope is in you. Thank you.