

“Hope for the World”

Bill Chadwick October 21, 2018

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church Bloomington, Minnesota

Philippians 4:8

Two years ago our theme for the program year was “Shalom” and last year “Love Grows Here.” Excellent choices. This year: “May the God of Hope Go with Us Every Day.”

We chose this because people are hungry for hope. Amen?

Terrorism. Climate change. The current political situation.

A recent survey asked, “All things considered, do you think the world is getting better or worse?” How would you answer that?

Only 6% of those polled in the US thought things are getting better.

“And yet (if one takes the long view) the facts show otherwise. In a powerful study entitled “The short history of global living conditions and why it matters that we know it” by Max Roser, an economist at the University of Oxford and the founder of *Our World in Data*, we learn that on virtually all of the key dimensions of human material well-being—poverty, literacy, health, freedom, and education—the world is an extraordinarily better place than it was just a couple of centuries ago.” This was reported in *Forbes Magazine* recently. (Steve Denning, “Why the World Is Getting Better and Why Hardly Anyone Knows It”, *Forbes*, November 30, 2017)

(Bad stuff makes news. The gradual improvement of life does not, so from time to time we need to be reminded. Now, in every example I will offer we are not where we want to be by a long shot. But things are trending the right direction. I could list more, but here are ten biggies.)

1. Poverty

“In 1950 75% of the (people of the) world were still living in extreme poverty. But today, those living in extreme poverty are now less than 10%.

2. Literacy

The education story is equally encouraging. Data shows that the share of the world population that is literate over the last two centuries has gone from a tiny elite to a world where 8 out of 10 people can read and write.

3. Health

Progress in health is equally astonishing. A key reason for our surprise? We don't know how bad things used to be. In 1800, more than 40% of the world's newborns died before the age of five. Now only a tiny fraction die before the age of five. How come? Modern medicine helped, particularly the discovery of germs, but even more important were improvements in housing, sanitation, and diet.

4. Freedom

Political freedom has also made progress... in the 19th Century almost everyone lived in autocratically ruled countries. Today more than half the global population lives in a democracy. "The huge majority of those living in an autocracy – 4 out of 5 – live in one autocratic country: China."

5. Education (and Population—they go together)

And education continues to improve globally.

(And) when women are educated, they have fewer children. "With today's lower global fertility, the researchers expect that the number of children will decline from now on – there will never be more children on the planet than today." It is expected that world population will peak in 2070 and decline thereafter. **(Slide 22 blank)**

(Those first five were from the Forbes article. The next five are from a variety of sources.)

6. Violent crime in the US is way down.

The Pew Research Center, among many sources, reports that **Violent crime in the U.S. has fallen sharply over the past quarter century.** The two most commonly cited sources of crime statistics in the U.S. both show a substantial

decline in the violent crime rate since it peaked in the early 1990s, the FBI stats show a 48% decrease and the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports a 74% decline in the violent crime rate. (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/30/5-facts-about-crime-in-the-u-s/>)

7. Violence against women While still at appallingly high rates, violence against women has shown a steady decline over the past 25 years in the US, and the issue is now being addressed globally by the World Health Organization, the World Bank and other international bodies.

8. Acceptance of GLBT people Certainly we have seen a major shift in the acceptance of folks who are GLBTQ and non-binary gender just in the last few years.

9. Clean energy is getting cheaper and cheaper.

(From an article about cheap renewables by Silvio Marcacci in *Forbes*. Marcacci notes that) "...the cost of solar energy was \$350 per megawatt hour back when Barack Obama took office, and it was \$60 when he left...As a consequence, solar energy generation rose 51% during (the year 2017), while the use of coal, nuclear energy, and natural gas has been declining..." <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sex-murder-and-the-meaning-life/201803/ten-ways-the-world-is-getting-better>

10. Fewer people are dying in wars than at any time in history. "the number of war deaths has... plummeted. In the 1950s, there were almost 250 deaths caused by war per million people. Now, there are less than 10 per million. (That's four percent of the rate from just 70 years ago.)
smithsonian.com March 21, 2014

Read more: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/globally-deaths-war-and-murder-are-decline-180950237/#kePUbmGorGufK3qv.99>

Again, we have a long ways to go in all these areas. But for the most part, things have gotten remarkably better in our lifetimes.

Yet our hope, for those of us in this room, is not in the inevitable “progress” of humankind. Our hope is in the God made known in Jesus, the God who ultimately holds history in her hands.

Thirty-five years ago when I was a young pastor in the Stillwater congregation I attended a talk here at Oak Grove given by the man who was head of the Presbyterian denomination’s Church and Society unit at that time. I’ve forgotten his name, but I will never forget what he said. He was speaking about South Africa and he said words to this effect:

“We worship a God of justice. And God’s justice cannot and will not forever be thwarted. I declare to you in the name of Jesus that apartheid will not stand. It will soon fall.”

I thought he was a cockeyed optimist with no attachment to reality. I saw absolutely no signs that things were changing one bit in South Africa. I couldn’t imagine that apartheid would be eliminated in my lifetime.

Just a handful of years later, 1994, the world watched Archbishop Desmond Tutu dancing around the ballot box as he cast the first vote of his lifetime at the age of 62. I was dumbfounded... and overjoyed.

Look at what happened in Minnesota here in the past few years as far as legalizing same-sex marriage. Ten years ago I didn’t think *that* would happen in my lifetime. (Granted, my lifetime is a lot shorter now.) The change in attitudes was so rapid. How did that happen? People talked to one another. That campaign was all about one-on-one conversations. It was marvelously effective!

Many of us know that famous quote of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” He used it many times in speeches and writings. He actually borrowed that line (and gave credit for it.) It comes from a 19th century clergyman and abolitionist, Theodore Parker.

Let’s listen to the full context in which King used it.

“Evil may so shape events that Caesar will occupy a palace and Christ a cross,” Dr. King wrote, “but that same Christ will rise up and split history into A.D. and B.C., so that even the life of Caesar must be dated by (Christ’s) name. Yes, ‘the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.’” <https://www.thedailybeast.com/obama-loves-martin-luther-kings-great-quotebut-he-uses-it-incorrectly> *The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.*

We see that in the Resurrection of Jesus, God’s emphatic yes to the teaching and the example of Jesus’ life. *The empty tomb* is why we have hope. The Resurrection demonstrates that evil and hatred and violence do not have the last word. Amen? So we can enter into the way of Jesus knowing that this Way—the way of justice, the way of compassion, the way of walking humbly with God, the way of love, wins.

Even if it didn’t, I would choose it. Because I am in love with Jesus. And that is what he commands.

This is a stewardship sermon. Our God is not a god of scarcity, but is a God of abundance. God calls us into partnership to create a world of justice and peace and love AND HOPE. Please be generous and joyful as you fill out your pledge card this week, knowing you are on the winning side.

To God be the honor and the glory and the praise, now and forever. Amen?
Amen!