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Here's Hope
by Rev. Jerry Rea

Losing Hope in the Haze

Experienced explorers in the Arctic tell you that one of the most dangerous hazards in the snow is the haze. The snow, wind, and sunlight (or lack thereof) cause you to lose sight of the horizon. Your balance suffers. Confusion sets in, and you lose direction. Up and down and sideways, everything begins to look the same.

What a great analogy for our age. In our culture we often hear the comment, "Well, there's a lot of gray area, too." In discussions at church and home, we are verbose when it comes to "right and wrong." What in circumstances looks simple to us is not so simple in our world. Looking at world religions, we wonder if we are the same. Each religion has its own "bible" or sacred writings. What makes ours special? Those who have "passed" on the local church are accurate when they say, "My life is just as good as theirs." There are no clear markers in the landscape, and few leaders willing to stand and take the heat in our world's "snow." It all has a way of blending together into a spiritual haze.

Here are a few markers. *Our Savior died for us.* He bled and substituted His blood for ours. Though other religions have martyrs and heroes, none have a sacrificial death at their heart. Dying for a cause that is just and right is so very different from dying for sinful humanity (Romans 5:5-6).

What about this one? *Our savior came down to us.* We cannot climb up some moral ladder of good deeds, so Jesus came down to us. He humbled Himself to death. He humbled Himself when He stepped out of heaven. He humbled Himself when He stepped into our broken world (our supreme mess). He humbled Himself enough to die, even the death of a cruel and rejected cross. He came down, while others (by common sense) teach us we must climb up.

What about the idea of giving? It is not natural to give. Human nature teaches us to take. People go so far as to say, "If you don't brag on yourself, who will?" While there is some truth in that statement, it reveals a "me" centered mindset. The perspective of grabbing for all you can get is what leads to wars. The Jesus attitude is one of giving. Obviously, He taught this when He died. He gave His life. He gave Himself to death. The giving of His life, however, was not the first time He gave. His attitude and His lifestyle was one of daily giving. He taught us to be the same way. "Take up your cross daily."

Last, but not least, there is *the powerful force of love.* While our world sees the virtue of love, it rarely helps us find it. Where do I get this love that I am to give to other persons, other nations, our own families, and even our pets? I mean, it's hard enough to love myself! The answer of Christianity is very simple. We love because we have been loved. He loved us first. That sets

us free and empowers us to pass that love along to others. You can't be a "giver" (only a "taker") if you struggle to feel loved. Over and over again, the message of our faith is love, love, love, love. We forgive because we have been forgiven. We have mercy because He first had mercy on us. Sensing His love, we are compelled to love others. That is true even when their skin is a different color. That is true even when their thought patterns seem so very different, even wrong. That is true even when (especially when) that love is not returned. God's word teaches us to love even when the object of our love is unlovable. Our love does not depend on them. Our love depends on Him. If you love in our world, you'll stand out from the haze.

I love you,
Jerry Rea