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## **Finding Hope**

by Rev. Jerry Rea

Sometimes hope is elusive. Like a butterfly that you just can't catch, it flies. You settle in on an individual and they say or do something and hope flies away. That organization, which has always been there and been a support, is not. Your friends that you can "always count on" are unexpectedly not there when needed most. Hope can be foundational, or it can feel like an earthquake moving and unsettled. There are ideas that were the building blocks for how you built your thinking but they (somehow) don't hold up any more.

Our culture has changed and with it our churches. Those who used to be the pillars of the church have become caterpillars... simply crawling in and out. Leaders of yesterday have vanished, replaced with cardboard replicas. They look like the real thing but fold with the rain and wind. Sometimes living in our day feels like wandering through a wilderness with others who are as lost as you are. With the demise of leadership has come a wilting of values and bedrock beliefs. The things that used to be wrong we have exchanged for a sanitized version of morality. This version says little and stands for less.

Last, but certainly not least, is the idea that things will be worse tomorrow than today, not better. Hope has dried like the morning dew on a hot Alabama afternoon. When you look into the future, what is the dream that pulls you forward? Where are those who envision and push for a better world?

Our hope has not changed, not in the least. That's because our God has not changed, not in the least. He is the God who asked the prophet Ezekiel, "Can these bones live?" Jesus is the same. Remember He asked the man at the pool, "Do you want to walk?" God found Elijah in the wilderness, through a still small voice then did not allow him to stay there but sent him back to work. God sent His son into a culture and a world empty of morals. It was so empty of anything positive that it decided the "right" thing to do was kill Jesus. But did they? By the work of Jesus a doorway has been created. He used the image of a ladder, like Jacob's ladder. Jesus tore down the veil and established a way into the presence of the Almighty. Jesus pushed open the tomb and walked out of the dark and into receptive hearts. As we sing, "Jesus made a way when there seemed to be no way." He made a way to get from the earth, to the presence of glory. But, in a greater way He made a way that the presence of eternity could reside in the human heart. You and I often get lost, but He always finds us. Do you remember that Peter denied his Jesus? What happened then? Jesus found him. Do you remember that Jesus touched the leper? No one would do that. All lepers had to hope for was death.

I remember a man who came to the altar so many years ago. I'd never seen him before, and I've never seen him since. "When I came today I was ready to throw in the towel," he said. "But today God spoke to me." He came into church hopeless; he left having been found by

God. God will help you find hope. I believe it. I know it. He sent Jesus to live among us, die for us, and come back to us. When He comes, He brings hope with Him.

Jesus has the hope you need!

Jerry Rea