

Twenty years ago, I began to work on a book focused on hope. A colleague of mine suggested I solicit ideas and thoughts on hope from others. I did that. As it turned out, I began the book with a quote from a Scottish pastor I had worked with on several projects. His words?

There is nothing concrete about hope, and its use is very wishy-washy.

Granted, that might seem an odd start. But it seemed then, and still seems, a helpful corrective. Too much that passes for hope is little more than wishful thinking detached from faithful action. Too much that passes for hope absorbs itself in self-centered daydreaming about what would be nice for me and mine, to the point of ignoring if not excluding concern for you and yours. Too much that passes for hope wants to let go and let God in all things, even in matters where God waits and waits for us to get off our duff and **do** something with all this grace poured out upon us. Confusions of hope with false optimism and flights from faithful responsibility are no better than wearying pessimisms that abandon us in despair or cynicism.

Our reading from Isaiah envisions a future filled with hope. The verbs are almost exclusively future tense as they speak of God's transformative actions. SHALL be established / SHALL be raised / SHALL judge / SHALL beat swords into plowshares. But there is a break in this pattern in the final verse. The verb tense changes to present, and the subject of the verb changes from God to: *come, let **us** walk in the light of the LORD!*

God's gift of hope is more than an attitude adjuster about the future that evokes thanks-giving.

God's gift of hope names our vocation in this present day to walk and live in hope's light.

For Reflection and Action:

When have you seen, or felt, hope reduced to "nothing concrete and wishy-washy?"

What hope do you carry, and are carried by, in these days; where are its sources for you?

In what ways might hope shape your thanks-giving into thanks-living?