

Horizons of Hope

Howard Schaap
Dordt University, howard.schaap@dordt.edu

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HORIZONS OF HOPE

Hope seems risky right now. I blame everybody's favorite scapegoat, social media. Posting something hopeful on social media these days feels like going into shark-infested waters with an open wound.

Then again, hope is a funny thing; it doesn't play well with predators. Or at least, that's the sense I get about hope from Romans 8—especially Romans 8:19 and 24b.

When I went looking for verses about hope, these two jumped out at me. Take my efforts for what you will, but these verses by themselves feel like proverbs that might stop the universe, and they both strike me as important instructions for how to hope in 2021.

As I write this, the headlines read that we have crossed the threshold of 500,000 Coronavirus deaths in the United States. Other headlines announce that Covid-19 vaccinations are picking up speed, after the first vaccines debuted only a few months ago. That means we will not have gone an entire winter without a vaccine for Covid-19. The speed of that achievement is astounding. This, too, is a gift of God.

Does the existence of a Covid-19 vaccine mean we have, as the old hymn says, "bright hope for tomorrow"?

When the word "vaccine" comes to mind, I think of the polio vaccine. I wasn't alive to understand the threat that polio was in the world, but I had an aunt who lived with its effects. Here is my impression: polio came to you from you knew not whence and it disfigured you and killed you by choking you, mainly children. It worked in that same "nature's lottery" sort of way that the Coronavirus works. Odds are you'll be fine, but if the

odds are not in your favor, heaven help you—even though heaven mainly stays out of it.

And that's where Romans 8:19 comes in: "For the creation waits in eager anticipation for the children of God to be revealed." When I think of creation in "bondage to decay" (Romans 8:21) or "groaning as in the pains of childbirth" (Romans 8:22), I think of polio—snuffing out the lives of children, disfiguring young women like my aunt in the prime of her life.

And when I think about that same creation waiting in "eager anticipation for the children of God to be revealed," I think about proper stewards of that creation, and in this case, I think of Jonas Salk.

It took Salk and his team seven years and more than a million participants to arrive at a polio vaccine. But they had a vision, and that vision has largely freed humanity from the terror that was polio.

“For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.”

— Romans 8:19

Now, I know that suggesting Salk is one of the "children of God" isn't quite right, and that it seems like I'm equating "children of God" and "scientists." They are certainly not the same thing. However, this is where exactly what we mean by "hope" comes in.

One of the problems we Christians have with hope is knowing whether it's an

earthly or heavenly thing. On the one hand, we feel we're supposed to save our ideas of hope for things we can't see, to take this verse about a yearning creation and think only of the final putting right of that creation—which we rightly say is Christ's work to do and not ours.

However, when human beings have a vision for how a twisted creation might be made straight, that's a high calling. To write one more disfigurement out of the human script as Salk and his cohorts did with the polio vaccine—that is the kind of thing, it seems to me, the very creation itself "in bondage to decay" is eagerly anticipating.

I'm not the authority to declare where the kingdom of God might be breaking into this world, but vaccines through which more lives may flourish on Earth rather than be disfigured—that feels like the kind of thing creation itself might be yearning for.

Here's another example: I have a friend who is a doctor in Honduras. When the Coronavirus first struck, he was exhausted from dealing with a dengue fever outbreak, which took lives in his community, mostly children. There is a dengue fever vaccine, but many people do not have access to it.

The creation is eagerly anticipating the appearance of the children of God everywhere—in some places more than others. We can do better with our horizons of hope.

The horizons of our hope—that's what concerns me about hope and vaccines, about new and old U.S. administrations, and about the "new normal" and old ones—and it's why the second of the Romans verses is so mind-blowing: "Who hopes for what they already have?" (Romans 8:24b)

As we hope in a vaccine, as we hope



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In All Things is a journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation. We want to expand our imagination for what the Christian life—and life of the mind—can accomplish. In pursuit of this end, we will engage in conversation with diverse voices across a wide range of traditions, places, and times.

in or despair of a new administration, is it just our own comfort that we want back? To get back to dinner parties, basketball games, and church as it used to be—to jostle past hundreds of people in a crowd? Because of the sanctions of the Coronavirus, we can now more clearly see those things as good gifts. But if we just want to get back to a bustling economy and the freedom to do as we like—if that “old normal” is what we hope for, the Apostle Paul tells us, that is “no hope at all.”

In essence, Paul asks us to renew our imaginations, to hope beyond known horizons. This is the value of a new year:

we can use the rupture in normalcy to look at the cracks of our culture—to see,

as Leonard Cohen says, where the light might be getting in. Due to Covid-19 lockdowns, reduced traffic and smog left city skylines transformed across the world. Oil crises around the world became non-crises.

“But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?”

— Romans 8:24b

Are the horizons of hope earthly or heavenly? Yes.

As Christians, it seems to me we err with both horizons: either we become focused on the beyond and can't see the creation rejoicing before us here and now, in vaccines and restored wetlands and less straws up the nostrils of sea turtles; or we become focused on earthly, known horizons and fail to imagine something that doesn't yet exist.

In 2020, Covid-19 broke things we thought were unbreakable. In that sense we are living through a type of apocalypse: the Coronavirus has enabled us to see certain seams of our civilization in a way that might help us imagine better ways of re-stitching them together.

May the year 2021 *not* be a return to an “old normal”; may it be the time to use our unique ability as Christians to see how creation is groaning and yearning for the children of God to be revealed.

In 2021, may we have eyes to see the horizons of hope—those that make the headlines, those that don't, and those that are beyond what we can ask or imagine.



HOWARD SCHAAP,
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

SERVING MORE THROUGH DUAL CREDIT

Dordt University's online dual credit program started in the fall of 2018 with just three students taking an English composition class. Much has changed in the program in those three years. This spring, 104 students are enrolled in Dordt online courses, getting a jumpstart on their college education.

Today, most high school students expect to earn college credit while in high school.

Families look for options to pursue and consider how dual credit can play into their educational goals. Dual credit course options are so plentiful that many students find it overwhelming to make decisions. Dordt offers dual credit opportunities that further a student's content-area interest while their understanding of the truth revealed in God's Word.



Earning college credit in high school is a great way to jump-start a college education, but such courses do not replace the importance of a strong high school education. As students search for dual credit courses, they should seek options that work well with their high school graduation requirements, giving them an opportunity to further explore a subject or allowing them to begin fulfilling common college requirements. Checking in with your high school counselor and your prospective college before committing to a dual credit course will help ensure that there are no surprises. Dordt staff are happy to help you navigate that process.

Dordt's dual credit program continues to develop as it tries to better serve students. This year marked the beginning of a partnership program with Christian high schools that allows them to receive a group discount on dual credit courses, giving even more savings for students and their parents. It's one more way we are reaching beyond our physical campus to “equip students, alumni, and the broader community to work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life.”



JOE BAKKER ('07), DIRECTOR OF ONLINE EDUCATION

DUAL CREDIT AT DORDT

To learn more about Dordt's dual credit program, visit dordt.edu/dual-credit.