

The writer to the Hebrews wants us to have confidence, and the courage to stand strong in our hope. A confidence that doesn't back down in the face of opposition. A courage that shows no fear. A confidence that will accept the danger that goes with the hope we have. A courage to make things right and just. All because of the hope we have. We are to stand tall with confident hope.

But what exactly are we hoping for? Just what is this hope that we stand tall for, with courage that is ready to face danger? Our **hope** is that we will go to be with Jesus when this life ends. We hope with **confidence** that when our body lies asleep in a grave we will rest with blissful assurance that Jesus will keep us safe.

But hope doesn't stop there. Hope looks forward even further. Hope looks to a day to come that makes all things new once again. We are hoping for Jesus to return on the last day. Our hope is that Jesus will come back and make everything right again. Our confident hope is that on that glorious day our bodies will return to life, transformed in such a way that sickness and pain will never be able to touch us again. On that incredible day, all injustice and evil will be done and gone. On that day all of creation will rejoice as death and decay will disappear.

Just think, on that day of resurrection, bodies alive once again with taste buds that surprise you with flavors you didn't know were possible; fingertips that feel the wonder of love in holding a hand or touching a face; smells that captivate you; sounds touching your ears of music, birds singing, people talking, words that make your heart burst with joy. And our eyes will see colors that make the 64 crayons in that yellow and green box way too few for the beauty of this world recreated to reflect God's glory. This last day resurrection of our bodies and this world is the thing for which we confidently hope.

But that confidence is threatened. Confidence stands tall in face of opposition. Courage means danger is just around the corner. What opposition? What danger? Unfortunately, we don't have to look too far to see opposition to Christ and opposition and even danger which threatens Christ's people.

On our retreat in northern Minnesota two weekends ago, some of the youth of our congregation talked with me about the unkind words that are sometimes spoken to them by their classmates at the high school because of their faith in Christ, going to church, and even for attending First Lutheran School. I have to admit it took me by surprise. I came to expect that growing up in Minneapolis, but sadly it happens here, too.

A report by two U.S.-based religious freedom groups says anti-Christian persecution is on the rise in America. “It is dramatic,” says Liberty Institute Founder Kelly Shackelford, of the recent hike in reported incidents of persecution. “I have been doing these types of cases for almost 25 years now. I have never seen the levels of attacks like these and how quickly they are now proliferating... There are children being prohibited from writing Merry Christmas to the soldiers, senior citizens being banned from praying over their meals in the Senior Center, the VA banning the mention of God in (some) military funerals, numerous attempts to have veterans memorials torn down if they have any religious symbols such as a cross, and I could go on and on,” Shackelford said. (Read more at <http://www.wnd.com/2012/09/persecution-of-christians-on-rise-in-u-s/#4Wu269UkQV8iMVWR.99>)

It’s easy to have our confidence shaken as we see these kinds of attacks against our religious freedom, against our faith. For now, these types of attacks against us Christians in America pale in comparison to what some of our fellow believers face every day in more hostile areas of the world like China, North Korea, the Middle East, and Africa.

Just two days ago over 30 Nigerian Christians were killed in a brutal early morning attack by radical Islamic Fulani herdsmen, who have been systematically targeting believers living on lands the extremists claim to be their territory.

The Guardian newspaper, **reported** that the deadly assault occurred at around 4 a.m. near the town of Maro, in Nigeria where the attackers set fire to several buildings, including homes and churches. The extremists then shot civilians with rifles as they fled the burning establishments.

(<https://www.dailywire.com/news/44111/muslim-extremists-murder-over-30-nigerian-jacob-airrey>)

When we see **any** kind of attack on our faith and on fellow believers it shakes our confidence. Courage is needed, but standing tall and calling attention to our hopes in Jesus is frightening. “Boast in our hope,” the writer to the Hebrews says, but it’s a lot easier to slink away to the safety of silence, of not making any waves.

It’s a good thing we don’t have to face all those dangers alone. We are never alone in this call to be confident in our hope, courageous in the face of whatever threatens our faith. The writer to the Hebrews encourages us to consider Jesus. He wants us to look carefully and think long and hard about Him. He wants us to fix our minds on Jesus.

Then he compares Jesus and Moses. Jesus is worthy of greater honor. Moses was just a servant. Jesus is the Son of God. Moses lived in God’s house.

Jesus built it. Moses was just a man. Jesus was man and God. Moses died and could lead his people no more. Jesus died... and rose again.

After all the excitement of the Transfiguration event- the bright-shinning Savior, the cloud, the appearance of Moses along with Elijah, the voice of God the Father – after all the excitement, “Jesus was found alone,” our Gospel lesson says. Moses and Elijah had departed. Moses represented the Law and Elijah represented the Prophets. Both were pointing ahead to Jesus. Even though the Law was important- and was a gift from God- Jesus is greater, because He has revealed the Father’s grace and truth in a way that Moses never could have. Jesus has come to bring salvation, which the Law was not able to do. More than that, Jesus has come to give us confidence and hope.

You see, we are not alone when it comes to confidence and hope. Consider Jesus. Walk up to His empty tomb and look at what He can do. Fix your minds on His glorious body risen from the dead. Our confidence comes from Jesus. Our hope is in Jesus. Think long and hard about what Jesus has done for us and promises to do for us. Stand tall in the hope that only Jesus can give.

But that’s not all. The writer to the Hebrews also says that Jesus is the builder of a house. What is that house? It has a firm foundation. It stands against attacks and threats because Jesus builds it. What is this house? The church.

Jesus does not leave us alone. He gives us each other to stand courageous and confident. A phrase has become popular the last few years is “I’ve got your back.” It means you’re not facing a threat alone; others are there for you. And you’re there for others. We’re in this struggle to stay confident and courageous together. We have each other’s backs.

In the church, Jesus brings us together to face the threats to our hope and faith. Here He gives us His Word to give us confidence and courage for the facing of this life. Here Jesus is present in the Lord’s Supper not only to bring to us the forgiveness of our sins but also to bring us together as the communion of saints, a family united together in this building called the church, so that we have each other’s backs.

I heard a story, that I know I’ve shared before, but it’s worth sharing again, about a young girl who had lost her hand. She was so self-conscious about her deformity that she didn’t want to leave her house. Finally, her mother convinced her to go to church. It would be one of her first outings since losing her hand. Her mother called her Sunday school teacher to let her know what was going on. But for some reason the teacher couldn’t make it at the last

minute and a substitute teacher stepped in. She wasn't aware of the young girl's fears and handicap.

During the class, she asked the children to make the church with their hands. You know, you turn your fingers upside down and interlock them and say, "This is the church." Then you raise your index fingers and say, "This is the steeple." Then you open your hands and say, "Here are all the people."

But the girl only had one hand. A boy in the class saw what was happening. He went over to her and gave her his hand. Together they made the church. On that day, that young boy was there for the girl. He had her back. She wasn't there alone.

We're here together. At First Lutheran Church and First Lutheran School we have each other's backs. We are Jesus' building, His church. He is with us and is our hope, our hope now, when we die, and for that great final day of His return. With that, the writer to the Hebrews says, we are people with confidence and courage, boasting of our hope to a world that needs such hope. Amen.