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A (Not So) Simple Word of (Audacious) Hope

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Good morning visitors to Earlham College, board of Overseers, faculty and staff. Of course I want to extend a very special good morning to the Earlham College graduating class of 2008. I would like to congratulate and truly commend all of you for getting to this very important point in your lives. By 5:00 (or so) this afternoon the formal ritual signaling your completion (or near completion) of a broad liberal arts education at Earlham College will have passed. It is the expectation of the college that your education in your specific disciplines, seasoned with broad work in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and the arts have convinced you of the virtues of life long learning. I for one hope that the disciplined life of the mind that you have been cultivating at Earlham is always firmly anchored in an active concern for the world in which we all live. Indeed, I would contend that the life of the mind is like an empty vessel if what one learns and teaches are wholly detached from the lives of "everyday people," in particular, those everyday people who live on the "underside of history."

It is sometimes said to graduating students that you will be leaving college to—only now—enter into the "real world." This is, as if while in college you have somehow been shielded from the contingencies, the complexities, the tragedies, and the promises of the "real world." I would like to suggest to you this morning that the divide between the college life and the society and world of which the college life is a part is not quite as expansive as some might think. This is so because life's contingencies, complexities, tragedies, and promises make visits upon every human being no matter where we are. Our common human desires for safety, security, and protection, for associations with and belonging to something that gives purpose and meaning to life, and our desire to be valued and respected by others are real life concerns anywhere and everywhere.

Indeed, your class of 2008 (as well as other 2008 senior classes around the country) has had its sense of safety, security, and protection from some of the more tragic contingencies of life seriously challenged. This academic year you have experienced the deaths of two sitting professors, Bob Southard and Peter Cline. In two consecutive years you have had to grapple with the (self-inflicted) deaths of two students, Austin Harris and Kai Woods. One year ago, last month, 32 people were shot to death and many more wounded at Virginia Tech University by a student gunman who then turned a gun on himself.

During the 2005–2006 academic year, 1,800 people lost their lives when Hurricane Katrina devastated much of the Mississippi River Gulf Coast. During the same academic year a devastating Earthquake hit near Islamabad, Pakistan, killing 86,000 people. In the 2004–2005 academic year an Indian Ocean Tsunami, with a force of 23,000 Hiroshima-type atomic bombs, left more than 225, 000 people dead or missing, with millions more left homeless in 12 nations. And of course, the world continues to lose thousands of lives each year as devastating wars and conflicts are waged in Iraq, Afghanistan, Darfur, and other places around the world.

Such unspeakably painful experiences with death tend to shake loose our common human anxieties and fears about the fragility and meaning of our lives. When tragedies of such magnitude visit upon the living, we are perhaps hard pressed to deny that we fear death far more than we fear any gods.

Many of you graduates here today have pressed on against significant odds in order to be seated here this morning: the loss of parents, significant financial hardships, and serious turmoil within the families, communities, and/or nations from which you arrived here at Earlham. Now as you ready yourselves to leave undergraduate life, you will enter into a world where all is not well. This is so because, notwithstanding all of the real beauty and promise of human existence in the natural world, there is nonetheless a specter of despair that haunts the world.

The philosopher Cornel West has suggested with respect to late twentieth-century America (and I think this resonates with what is happening in the world at large), that, "The quality of our lives and the integrity of our souls are in jeopardy. Wealth inequality and class polarization are escalating—with ugly consequences for the most vulnerable among us. The lethal power of global corporate elites and national managerial bosses is at an all-time high. Spiritual malnutrition and existential emptiness are rampant. The precious systems of caring and nurturing are eroding. Market moralities and mentalities—fueled by economic imperatives to make a profit at nearly any cost—yield unprecedented levels of loneliness, isolation, and sadness. And our public life is in shambles, shot through with icy cynicism and paralyzing pessimism."[1]

Indeed, we live in a world at perpetual war with itself. In the context of persuasive anxiety, fear, and the ever-present violence associated with these, we humans—we citizens of the planet earth—now spend as much time burying our children as we do burying our elderly loved ones.

In so many corners of the world spiritual communities are under siege; I speak here of the kinds of communities that habituate and educate people to love themselves and others; the kinds of communities which help families, neighborhoods, and societies face despair, disease, life and death with love, dignity, and mutual commitment undergirded by hope.

[1] Cornel West, *Restoring Hope: Conversations on the Future of Black America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), xi.

The Bible passage read a few moments ago points to the core theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, which are critical to the witness of Christians in the world. But perhaps these dispositions of character, these forms of embodied excellence, might be viewed as more broadly suited to the challenges of living in the world even if one is not a Christian. In particular, the grammar of hope, i.e., "the desire [for] something together with the expectation of obtaining it," is a common human capacity and yearning. The systematic theologian Daniel Migliore contends rightly that "hope fights against despair and resignation to the way things are and keeps human life open to transformation in personal and social dimensions."[2]

We human beings consistently hope for outcomes related to the circumstances and events of our lives. Whether it is understood as a virtue, or principal, or emotion, or feeling, or dictate of reason, or some combination of these, hope is a basic human capacity that sustains us notwithstanding the difficulties and obstacles that trouble, worry and afflict us.

I have noticed at Earlham College that the expression of hope many students carry is a hope tied to a significant degree of optimism about the real possibilities of creating a better world. Many of you have surveyed the human condition from many complex historical, contemporary, and interdisciplinary viewpoints, and some or many of you have concluded that an optimistic hope for a suffering world is warranted. You have surveyed the evidence of associational human life, and have concluded that (with much difficult and persistent effort in the service of justice) that our associational lives in the world have gotten better throughout history and/or is going to get better. You have concluded, with much solid justification, that the modern and contemporary world, compared to the ancient worlds of antiquity up to the dawn of Enlightenment, is really more civilized. That is to say that human progress has made us more politically and culturally enlightened, that we are in a place in history of significant social progress.

Indeed (for example), we celebrate the now 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights; we celebrate the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and we can celebrate the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. These United Nations sponsored initiatives offer significant evidence of a collective hope that is based in significant levels of optimism concerning the possibilities for enlighten human associations in the contemporary world. We have the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, we have Doctors Without Boarders, we have Amnesty International, we have Greenpeace, and we have a complex host of other organizations, communities, and individuals who wage peace with justice every day of the week, every month of the year, year in and year out. Indeed, such efforts ought to leave us optimistic to the degree that collective humanity does display a solid willingness to work against poverty, war, displacement, and disaster.[3]

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[2] Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Second Edition, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 412.

[3] See and cf. Micheline R. Ishay, *The History of Human Rights: From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and Michael Ignatieff, *Human Rights As Politics And Idolatry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

I want to suggest to you that hope often does imply a certain amount of actively optimistic wishing and wanting, a sort of demonstrating in the here and now a foreshadowing of the better selves, communities, societies and world we wish to create, and "know" is possible.

But, class of 2008, I need to tell you something. I need to tell you that there comes times when you will need to embrace hope even when optimism about the state of things may well seem unwarranted. Sometimes you will survey the evidence of your personal lives and humanity's collective life in this world and infer that things don't look like they are getting better. The kind of hope that must face up to the reality that some outcomes we seek will be impossible, or at least extremely unlikely, is the kind of hope that needs a potent adjective to accompany it. And that adjective is the word "audacious." Audacious hope is the kind of hope that boldly and assertively (but also quietly and behind the scenes) continues to work for a better state of affairs even when we cease to feel optimistic about desired outcomes. If you embody audacious hope, you become a positive participant struggling with perseverance against despair and suffering that just will not quit. With audacious hope (that is, the hope that perseveres even when things don't look too good) you learn to wrestle well with despair; you never, ever, allow despair (whether it is personal or social) to have the last word. With audacious hope, you will not allow (for example) the seeming inevitability of wealth inequality, group xenophobia, social breakdowns, or individual depression or personal despair to slay you.

Although the complexities and subtleties of my advocacy of audacious hope will be impossible to cover here this morning, I suggest to you that one can see its manifestations and/or the critical need to embody such a hope all around us in modern culture.

Audacious hope can be detected in the words of the existentialist novelist/philosopher Albert Camus (1913–1960) when he writes

> Poverty was not a calamity for me. It was always balanced by the richness of light…circumstances helped me. To correct a natural indifference I was placed halfway between misery and the sun. Misery kept me from believing that all was well under the sun, and the sun taught me that history wasn't everything.
>
> *-De L'Envers et L'Endroit*

Although Camus gives no indication that misery will be eradicated from history, there nonetheless remains an audacious hope, powered by the light of the sun, that history's misery may not have the last word.

The need for audacious hope can be seen when a female blues singer cries out in anguish: "The man I'm gonna marry ain't been born yet, / and his momma died long ago."

Here audacious hope (when at its best) would involve one's pressing on without waiting on the companionship of a love that apparently will never come. Here one would need to press on anyway without the hoped-for love that died even before it was born.

Audacious hope can also be detected in the song lyrics of the modern-day neo-soul singer Alicia Keys. In her song titled "Like You'll Never See Me Again," Alicia Keys suggests a profound lover's question; what if we have no more time, no more time left to be here, would we cherish what we have in one another? Keys presses herself to not forget that the present is a gift; she does not want to take for granted the time her lover may have here with her. She understands well that, "Lord only knows another day here's not really guaranteed." In light of the reality of life's uncertainty, Keys, with a musical grammar of unspeakable hope, powered by love, says to her lover, "So every time you hold me / Hold me like this is the last time / Every time you kiss me / Kiss me like you'll never see me again / Every time you touch me / Touch me like this is the last time / Every time you kiss me / Kiss me like you'll never see me again. As Keys sings to her lover, one can sense that anxiety and fear about the fragility of life does not deter the possibilities of love's beauty. And this is audaciously hopeful indeed.

Now I admit that I don't know of too many people who can sustain this mental state about their love for a lover over a lifetime, even given our awareness of life's uncertainties. But perhaps Alicia Key's provides us with a vision of audacious hope that can inform human associations whether or not they are grounded in the passions of romantic love. I would like to suggest to you that the power that sustains audacious hope is love.

In the Scripture reading this morning it was suggested that the power that sustains both faith and hope is none other than love. In the reading, love is viewed as the greatest of the Christian virtues. To be sure, the grammar of love has many dimensions that fuel hope. There are romantic and aesthetic dimensions of love. Love might be understood in connection to the soul's yearning for the realm of the divine. A love that sustains hope might be expressed in the mutual affection and camaraderie between and among friends. Indeed these are all important dimensions and expressions of love in the service of hope. But the love that was suggested in the passage this morning was of a different sort. The kind of love, which grounds hope in that particular Christian passage, is the love that grounds audacious hope. It is the kind of love that sustains active audacious hope not only for the people we happen to like, or for the "strangers" among us, but also for those we consider our enemies.

This dimension and expression of love powers the creative and transforming power of a hope that is audacious; a hope that is foolishness to the world. This love values the dignity and worthiness of both ourselves as well as our neighbors, whether those neighbors are next door or on the next continent. Indeed the love that powers audacious hope for Christians is the love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things." It is the greatest of all spiritual gifts. Love (as regard for self and the "other," whether you like the other or not) is a Divine gift, the datum of which is the Christian God.

No doubt some of you sitting here today will find problematic, or cannot resonate with, the essentially Christian roots of the love, which I suggest might sustain audacious hope. Indeed, even we Christians must confess that we rarely live up to the ultimate standard of love. We must acknowledge the historical lovelessness and hatred we have sowed in the world. We have actively participated in the attempted-murder of love and hope against those of other religious faiths as well as those who claim no faith in higher powers. The noisy gong and clanging arrogance of our oppressive power in the world has drawn others into bloodthirsty conflict with us.

No less than the very perceptive William Shakespeare understood this. In Shakespeare's late sixteenth century comedy *The Merchant of Venice* the Jewish character Shylock must put up with the loveless hatred that is aimed at him by Christians. Even one supposedly sensible and high-minded Christian in the play, Antonio, "freely confesses that he is accustomed to revile Shylock, to spit at him, to kick him..." Shylock the Jew, in the minds of Christians, is considered a "dog" or "cur." About midway through the play Shylock speaks to one of Antonio's friends saying,

> I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, heal'd by the same means, warm'd and cool'd by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.[4]

Of course in our contemporary times, all over the globe, we find Christians, Jews, Muslims, and many other categories of racial, ethnic, and national human affiliations engaged in all manner of bloody conflict between and amongst one another.

In light of the state of the world today, all of you in this class of 2008 have important roles to play in the world's ability to cope with horrifying levels of both lovelessness and hopelessness.

Love (as mutual regard for the inherent worth and dignity of one's self and all others) can drive a hope that understands About Itself that it must be the last thing to die. For "without hope there can be no struggle." Without hope, humans and the earth do not survive and do not flourish. And as I said earlier, the fountainhead of (audacious) Christian hope is Divine love. But while that is the narrative inside of which many in the world locate hope, active hope (i.e., the active pursuit of the not yet) is not a uniquely Christian desire or virtue. My assumption is that attention to the quality of human relationships with one another and the planet earth is a universal human interest. I imagine that a concern for the survival of hope can be embraced by peoples of many religious traditions or by peoples with more secular understandings of human associations.

[4] G. Blakemore Evans, ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 268).

If you believe that hope is undergirded by religious faith, then mine for a better hope there. If you feel that hope is undergirded by a basic human instinct for survival and wellbeing, then dig deep for the best of that understanding. If you feel that hope is sustained by the dictates of reason (with no appeal whatsoever to eternal divine forces), then mine for the roots of a better hope there. Now I want to be clear that I do not intend to give the impression that religious faith and human instinct are necessarily opposed to reason.

As a matter of fact religious faith and the passions and appetites of instinct, are often co-mingled with reason. Many philosophers over the centuries have suggested that it is the capacity to reason that distinguishes human beings from the rest of the animal world. In the words of the 1st century Roman jurist and philosopher Cicero (106–43 B.C.), it is the capacity to reason which allows humans "[to comprehend the chain of consequences, perceive the causes of things, understand the relation of cause to effect and effect to cause, draw analogies, and connect and associate the present and the future, all of which allows humans to easily survey the course of our whole life and make the necessary preparations for its conduct.]"[5]

No matter how we conceive of the foundations of our hope, there is no doubt in my mind that we humans ought to take seriously the sentiments of the twentieth-century theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr observed that, even with a distinctive capacity to reason, we human beings are our own most irritating problem.

Humans are finite natural creatures who are subject to all the uncertainties associated with finitude, yet we are endowed with self-consciousness reason and spiritual freedom, which allows us (to a degree, or so we imagine) to transcend our creatureliness and the natural order.

Unlike other natural creatures, humans ponder and act upon questions regarding the value of life—whether or not life is worth living, and if so, the manner in which it is to be lived. Reason, though finite, allows us humans to imagine standing outside of ourselves to render an estimate and judgment of human life.

The dialectic between human finitude and a freedom of spirit that allows us to think beyond finitude becomes the occasion under which humans inevitably become filled with anxiety and fear. On the one hand, humans know that, in relation to the cosmos, we are insignificant and (as Niebuhr put it) "living a precarious existence on a second-rate planet, attached to a second-rate sun."[6] But, on the other hand, we (as a species) imagine ourselves as occupying the center of the universe. We humans are capable of knowing well that we are children of nature and subject to the same impulses, drives, and brevity of years which is the lot of all organic forms, but we also often imagine spiritual

[5] Arthur F. Holmes, ed. *War and Christian Ethics: Classic and Contemporary Readings on the Morality of War* (Second Edition, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 25. Primary source: Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis* 1, trans. W. Miller, in *The Loeb Classical Library.*

[6] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation, Vol. 1 Human Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 3.

realities, which stand outside of ourselves, nature, life, reason, and the world. In the context of this conceptual dualism, human history is characterized by ill-fated attempts to transcend the anxiety and insecurity associated with our simultaneous creature-yet-more-than-creature status.

In the freedom of our spiritual imagination combined with the perceived weakness of finitude, humans feel anxious and insecure, and as a consequence we have a difficult time resisting a will-to-power over others and our natural environment. To the extent that the human ego seeks to subordinate other humans and nature beyond the level necessary for survival, it is involved in the will-to-power. Temptation to will-to-power is occasioned by many dialectical interplays within human experience: Humans have unlimited and limited knowledge, we are strong and we are weak, we are free and we are bound, we are aware and we are unaware, we are blind but we are also far-seeing; and all this and more while standing at the juncture of nature and spirit, involved in freedom and necessity. Humans are also simultaneously creative and destructive, and therefore have a very difficult time purging our creative moral achievements of a will-to-power.[7]

This state of human reality has been persistent throughout human history. In light of this, my audacious hope for your work and service in the multiple worlds you will encounter beyond Earlham College, is that you (the class of 2008) fashion the virtue, spirit, principle, emotion, and reason of a better hope for the world into a politics of audacious hope.

A politics of audacious hope is a politics precisely because it is concerned with the manner in which we human beings better arrange and manage our common lives together across wide-ranging differences, including versions of happiness.

Indeed, a politics of audacious hope is expressive of a political order the "essence" of which, drawing on Sheldon Wolin's discussion of Plato, is the existence of fairly settled institutional and social arrangements "designed to deal in a variety of ways with the vitalities issuing from associated life: to offset them when necessary, to ease them where possible, and, creatively, to redirect and transmute them when the opportunity allows."[8] Politics (at its best) manages our associational lives as we human beings work to gain and act upon the knowledge we need to associate wisely in contexts of conflict, ambiguity, and continuous change.[9]

Although a politics of audacious hope is often bound to various spiritual narratives of perfection, even when at its sublime best such a politics, inevitably, never represents more than a creaturely correspondence, a shaky, unsteady and provisional witness to the moral visions we human beings hope to establish in practice.

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[7] See and cf. throughout, Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man: Human Nature* and *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).

[8] Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Expanded Edition, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 41.

[9] Cf. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, p. 40. Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, "Democratic Time: Lessons Learned from Yoder and Wolin," *CrossCurrents*, (Winter, 2006): 544.

A politics of audacious hope is audacious precisely because it understands that xenophobia, racism, classism, patriarchy, homophobia, ethnic and national hatreds, jealousy, envy, greed, and arrogance are apparently integral, permanent, and indestructible features of human association, yet we still work to eradicate these, refusing to give in to disabling despair.

As you navigate through life, you will find that you are going to need both hope that is optimistic and audacious hope whenever optimism wanes. Without the essentially spiritual virtue of hope, in particular its audacious expression, humanity can easily find ourselves overwhelmed with despair. I say that hope is a spiritual virtue because the overwhelming majority of the world's peoples imagine and express dimensions of ultimate hope that lie beyond our natural, finite, temporal and creaturely limitations.

To be sure, as I suggested earlier, signs of audacious hope can be seen all around us.

When Black American Christians are going through something, audacious hope can be detected in our dogged belief that God will "make a way out of no way."

Signs of audacious hope can be seen whenever, in defiance of a politics of hate and despair, there continues to be people and organizations around the globe that routinely extend a cup of cold water to those who are thirsty, food to those who are hungry, and who display the courage and sacrifice to work against the systemic structures that foster a desperate thirst and hunger for life.

Audacious hope can also be seen in the multiplicity of ways we celebrate life in defiance of despair. A politics of audacious hope involves not only lamenting and gnashing of teeth as we seek a better way, but it also involves an active celebration of life. So by all means, class of 2008, go out and celebrate. Listen to the beautiful music of life that feeds the soul. Get your groove on. I am not saying you necessarily need to "drop it like it's hot," or "get your freak on," but do celebrate life in the service of the better world we audaciously hope to create.

Indeed, we celebrate life in defiance of a politics of fear and death.

Before making the decision to come to Earlham College, I noted such defiance in a description of typical Earlham students in The Princeton Review of Best Colleges. The Review described Earlham students as "Birkenstock-Wearing, Tree-Hugging, Clove-Smoking Vegetarians." While this description of course does not give a true sense of the great diversity of students that attend Earlham College, it does speak to the sort of celebratory defiance of despair to be found in many Earlham students. As the planet groans under the weight of various theologies of mass production, consumption, and consumerism (which is too often viewed as the summit of human happiness), many Earlham students protest even as they celebrate life. Even as many of you work to save a planet now in great peril, you partake of its bounty. While I do not know how many students actually smoke cloves, I have walked past the dorms enough to know that some of you celebrate by smoking something as you work to save the planet and otherwise spread peace.

Two weeks ago today, I saw audacious hope in action as I walked by the home of my colleague Welling Hall, who is a professor of politics. Many of Welling's courses deal with issues of international human rights. As I stopped briefly to greet and speak with Welling, who was busily working in her front yard on a slightly overcast day, she expressed audacious hope in a comment to me. In the context of Welling's apparent weariness, low spirits, and perhaps unspeakable doubt about the state of international affairs on that particular Saturday morning, she was there, in her front yard, with her hands digging into the earth, telling me that she was "trying to make beauty grow." Welling's modest attempt to make beauty grow in a front yard, in Richmond, IN, with a bloodstained and suffering world on her mind, is expressive of audacious hope.

At a college like Earlham, where a dimension of the ethos feels like a cultural throwback to the hippie subculture of the 1960s and 70s, where one can experience a significant degree of "flower power," "making beauty grow" is perhaps a nice metaphor for an audacious hope that refuses to yield to the inevitable weeds of despair.

My hope for you (class of 2008) is that you will participate in lives of celebratory justice in the service of making beauty grow. That you will dance, and sing, and laugh, and love even as you wrestle with the multiplicity of hatreds that sit astride our world like death on a pale horse.

I hope that you, class of 2008, will sow beauty, and celebrate beauty, in a world of high anxiety and fear, "which scatters hate like seed to sprout its bitter barriers where the sunsets bleed."[10]

I hope that all of you might find occasion to make beauty grow as you fight against the inevitable genocidal rage that visits upon every human generation. Even now such rage in the world kills many a dream as yet unborn.

In your personal lives, my hope is that you will grow beauty while wrestling well against the kinds of self-loathing, alienation, and despair that might prompt you to feel like a trespasser on the human race. I also hope you can avoid the kind lovelessness that prompts you to see something in the misfortune of even your best friends that does not displease you.

Indeed, to sum up what I have been trying to convene to you this morning with a few words from the grammatical lectionary of the typical Earlham College student I teach. (And here some of the guests among us may want to hold their ears.) I would say that embracing audacious hope as a way of life, against death dealing suffering and despair, means that you have to give a shit about life in the world we live; because if you do not give a shit, the world will go to shit.

No doubt some of you will find the usage of an expletive to be highly inappropriate on an occasion such as this. But I would say that one is not always permitted to use the language of gentility when expressing the shadow-side of the human condition. The language of pollution is an apt metaphor for the grotesque personal, social, and political consequences that abound whenever and wherever audacious hope fails.

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[10]Lines borrowed from the Langston Hughes poem *Georgia Dusk*. See Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, ed. and assoc. ed., *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 448.

I suggested to you earlier that the foundation(s) of audacious hope has its source in a variety of narratives and worldviews. But, drawing on the twentieth-century political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), I want to suggest to you that there is a foundation for audacious hope that is both promising and universal no matter what historical narrative or worldview we put our faith and trust in. On page 247 of the second edition of Arendt's classic text *The Human Condition*, she argues the following,

> The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new [human beings] and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, these two essential characteristics of human existence which Greek antiquity ignored altogether, discounting the keeping of faith as a very uncommon and not too important virtue and counting hope among the evils of illusion in Pandora's box. It is this faith in and hope for the world that found its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their "glad tidings": "A child has been born unto us."[11]

Class of 2008, the fact that all of you were born into this world is the foundational miracle that grounds audacious hope. The fact of your having been born into the world provides the world with new opportunities to work against the blood-red ironies of history. As you depart from this place, I trust that you will be grounded and buoyed by an audacious hope for the world that will never quit.

With your minds, bodies, and spirits' embrace of such a hope, you can enter well into the terrible and magnificent struggle for the re-creation of human affairs and the natural world. With audacious hope you join the compassionate seekers of the past and of the future.[12]

I hope that all of you will find something useful to carry with you from this "Not So Simple Word of Audacious Hope" I have tried to convey this morning.

– peace and love

[11] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Second Edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 247.

[12] (Cf. Vincent Harding, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), xxvi.)