

Rideau Park United Church
Sermon: Where Does Hope Begin (Rev. Jim Baldwin)
Sunday, November 30, 2025

Last week I was thinking about the services for Advent and in particular, how I would start the season with a message of hope. That's when this image showed up on my Facebook page, with the following explanation:

"Imagine a world where 1 million children, across 5000 schools in Thailand, come together with one single purpose: to meditate for world peace. It's not a dream – it's happening right now. The power of collective intention is undeniable, and seeing this massive group of young people focused on something as peaceful as meditation shows just how much hope we have in the next generation.

In a time when the news is often filled with chaos, violence, and division, it's refreshing to see something this pure. These children are teaching us the importance of mindfulness, unity, and the potential of collective action. They are the future, and they're proving that peace isn't just a lofty idea – it's achievable.

If this moment doesn't give you hope for humanity's future, nothing will. These kids are shaping tomorrow, one mindful breath at a time. And maybe, just maybe, they'll inspire the rest of us to follow their lead."

I was curious to know more about the image so I did a little research. I discovered that the initiative was started in 2008 by the "V-Star Change the World" project, which promotes inner peace, moral values, and unity among the next generation.

This is an annual event that typically takes place in February or March, around Magha Puja Day, which is one of the most significant Buddhist festivals in Thailand. The creators of the project believe that through collective meditation, these children send out positive energy, hoping to foster a more peaceful and harmonious world. They also believe it is a powerful reminder of how much good we can achieve by coming together in peace.

At the end of their website, they say "Let's spread love, peace and positivity every day."

The "V" in V-Star stands for virtuous. The project aims to raise children who are virtuous and moral, and in preparation for the annual event, they are required to complete a list of ten tasks every day, for a period of three months. The children

volunteer in order to participate and each year, more and more children sign up to be part of the project.

What are the daily tasks? Well, they vary, based on the interpretation of each item on the list, but they include things like helping with the household chores, doing the dishes, saving money. Here are the ten habits that support well-being:

1. Define your purpose, goals and objectives – because planning will help you to be more productive.
2. Get up earlier: as this will give you more time to accomplish your goals.
3. Drink water: water eliminates toxins, eases digestion, boosts metabolism and increases energy.
4. Single Task: because multitasking really doesn't work. You think you are paying attention to everything around you, but in reality, your brain is just switching between them very rapidly. Give each task your full attention.
5. De-clutter: because external clutter = mental clutter.
6. Lay off the tech: The biggest timewaster is probably the internet, and time wasted is an opportunity lost.
7. Have a routine: because done correctly, it can lead to more freedom and a more independent lifestyle.
8. Make your bed: A tidy space can mean a tidier mind. And if we start the day by doing one productive thing that makes us feel good, we are more likely to continue doing productive things throughout the day.
9. Take some time to think: our society is built around productivity, so we rush around doing one thing after another until it's time to sleep. The most successful people dedicate time to reflection and meditation, in order to dream and to visualize.
10. Remember to have fun while developing better habits: Life is too short to take everything seriously. Having fun is not a luxury, it is a necessity.

When I first saw the post with the picture of 1 million children meditating for peace, I was moved and deeply inspired. As a parent, getting four children to sit still for any length of time was an accomplishment...so the idea of 1 million children staying focused on one task is awe-inspiring. I loved the idea of bringing children together in such a positive way. And as the original post stated, "In a time when the news is often filled with chaos, violence, and division, it's refreshing to see something this pure."

Then I made the mistake of reading some of the comments.

There were lots of positive reactions, but there were also a lot of comments from internet trolls who ridiculed the idea that prayer could accomplish anything; suggesting that it was a huge waste of time, with no evidence to prove that it worked.

It reminded me of the time Texas was hit by severe flooding, and people on social media were sending their thoughts and prayers. At that time someone posted a picture with a caption that stated "Thoughts and prayers on their way to Texas." The photo showed the back of an empty tractor trailer. The suggestion was obvious; that thoughts and prayers are empty gestures.

But I have to disagree. After the Chernobyl disaster, I met a woman from Belarus who started a movement with thoughts and prayers. She prayed for a way to support the families in her homeland, and her prayers were heard by a group of teachers who formed the Canadian Relief Fund for Chernobyl Victims in Belarus. That first summer they brought a dozen children to the Ottawa area for respite and sent them home with supplies for their families and communities.

Their stay in a clean environment reduced the level of cesium in their bodies by 50%. When they returned to Belarus, the levels increased once again, but their families reported that they had more energy, they stayed healthier throughout the year and missed less days of school. They attributed the change to their time in Canada, but also to the vitamins that were sent home with them for the year.

I heard about the organization when I was invited to sing at a fundraising event. That Sunday, we included the children in our prayers at church and within a week, a local group had formed and fundraising began to bring more children to Canada the next summer.

In what I described as a "rippling effect" those initial thoughts and prayers spread from person to person and within a few years, hundreds of children were being brought to groups that were established from the Maritimes to British Columbia. We expanded our aid to schools and orphanages and each year we sent shipments of medical supplies, such as equipment to set up dental clinics in the schools, and wheelchairs that gave children their first opportunity to engage in their communities.

I believe in the power of prayer...because I believe that when we focus our attention on a problem, it will lead to actions that bring change. I believe in the power of prayer, because studies have shown that positive thinking can have a positive effect on our physical and mental well-being...and what is prayer if not positive thinking? I believe in the power of prayer because when people of faith come together – whether it is 1 million children praying for peace in Thailand – or two or more gathered in Christ's

name...God's presence is there. And every positive change started out as a thought or a prayer.

Where does hope begin? As we enter this season of Advent, I would say that hope begins just as it did so long ago - with the promise of a child born in a manger, who would be the Prince of Peace; teaching us how to live in peace by loving one another.

I Thessalonians says that earnest prayer will supply what is lacking. It will lead to a love that overflows and we've seen it in action: Hope begins with one pair of winter gloves that grows to 12 bins in two weeks...hope begins with one shoebox that will grow to more than a hundred...hope begins with donations that will feed 175 families in our community...and all of these projects started with a thought and a prayer. Where does hope begin for you this Advent? May you find it in your heart, and may it fill your life with the hope, peace, joy and love of Christmas. Amen

Communion

Hope is in the sacrament of communion...because hope begins with the invitation to the table; an invitation that is filled with the promise of forgiveness and grace. Hope begins with hands reaching out; to give and to receive a piece of bread and a sip of wine...because our hope is grounded in the unconditional love of God that says you are welcome...you are worthy...so come in Jesus' name.