

Editorial: Living hopefully in a season of pessimism

August 8, 2014

Have you ever seen the pessimist's bumper sticker? "Due to budget cuts, the light at the end of the tunnel has been turned off." It would be funnier if it didn't feel so true.

That sticker echoes a classic conversation from the original *Star Trek* TV show ...

Dr. McCoy: "Tell me, Spock. Why are you Vulcans such pessimists?"



Editor Marv KnoxMr. Spock: "Doctor, do you know the difference between an optimist and a pessimist? The pessimist simply has more information."

We certainly live in pessimism-inducing times.

The rate of war nears unprecedented levels. According to [one Internet source](#), wars—defined as conflicts that result in 1,000 or more battle-related deaths per year—are being waged in 10 countries. Serious armed conflicts—which inflict 200 to 999 casualties per year—are scarring eight more nations. Other armed conflicts have broken out in 14 additional countries.

Beyond war, Ebola is ravaging West Africa, HIV/AIDS still afflicts parts of

Africa and elsewhere, planes have fallen from the sky, Russia's Vladimir Putin is behaving like a bully, and children are immigrating to our border. Congress is gridlocked. The stock market has limped lately. Even paradise, Hawaii, is enduring two hurricanes.

If this feels like *déjà vu*, you've been paying attention to the news. And you may have [read the editorial](#) in this space two weeks ago.

Pervasive pessimism

So, it's not surprising [multiple polls](#) show pervasiveness of pessimism across the planet.

How we respond to these conditions often depends upon our mindset. Winston Churchill, who led Great Britain through unspeakable adversity during World War II, acknowledged the same circumstances can produce opposite results: "The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty."

Churchill probably was correct. But with all due respect to the ["Last Lion,"](#) the opposite of pessimism is not optimism. It is hope.

That's why it's hard to be a faithful Christian and a pessimist. We possess hope.

Don't sell hope short. Hope isn't Pollyannaish. It's not naïve. It realizes evil exists, and evil sometimes prevails.

Hope in the furnace

But hope does not despair, even in the face of calamity. In the Old Testament book of Daniel, the Hebrew young men Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego held fast to hope, even as they acknowledged they might die in their persecutor's super-heated oven. They told the king: "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and

he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

They spoke with confidence because they embraced a divine truth: Hope tells us present circumstances are not ultimate.

Hope helps us remember resilience. It recalls occasions when darkness seemed to prevail, but dawn arrived again.

Hope confirms we do not fear evil, because "... the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Hope is evangelistic

Hope repeats wisdom from the Apostle Peter: "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened. But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:13-15).

In that regard, hope is evangelistic. When we lean into hope, it grows in us. When we speak of hope, it grows in others.

This is a season of pessimism. But if you believe in God and have placed your trust in Christ Jesus, live in hope.