My colleague, Victoria Safford, says that the work of being a minister is to arrive in the pulpit, each Sunday, with a “punctual and articulate hopefulness.”

The job of the preacher, she says, is to speak truthfully and to speak hopefully.

To hold truth and hope together. On schedule. Week after week.

While I wholeheartedly agree with her about this sacred duty, I agree even more when she points out that this is an almost impossible task.

After all, there are days. And there are weeks. And then months and entire years. When hope is very hard to find.

And, yet, that is the work—to balance speaking the truth with an enduring word of hope.

That is the task to which I set my heart through ordination and in accepting the call to serve in ministry among you.

It is work that I truly love. Even when it feels impossible.

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Here at the threshold of this new year, it may feel that the weight of the hard truths coming our way
can’t be realistically balanced by our hopes for the future.

But that, Dearly Beloved, is the work.

In the face of even the hardest facts,  
the real work is to seek out hope.  
To scan the horizon for signs of promise.  
For hints of progress.  
To invest ourselves in finding the sources of light, and of life.

To relentlessly remember that there is more to the story.  
To know in our bones that we are co-authors of the story of the world,  
and that the end has yet to be written.

While this work of speaking truth and speaking hope is work that Lynn and I have both gladly taken on,  
I am here to tell you today that this work does not belong solely to us, as your ministers.

It is work that belongs to each and every one of us.  
To each and every one of you.

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There is so much that is deeply worrying about the state of our world in this moment.

There is so much that is broken and in need of repair.

So much that is hurting and in need of healing.

So much that is uncertain and in need of faith—so much in desperate need of an active and abiding hope that will help to bring a better world into being.

This is the work to which we, together and as individuals, are called.

Now, to be clear, I’m not talking about an idle, anemic hope that is the stuff of simple, shallow desire.
The hope to which we are called must be deeply rooted in our living into the best of our humanity.

In my opinion, no one speaks to this more persuasively, right now, than Rebecca Solnit.

Take in her extended reflection on the meaning and power of hope¹:

Causes and effects assume history marches forward, but history is not an army.

It is a crab scuttling sideways, a drip of soft water wearing away stone, an earthquake breaking centuries of tension.

Sometimes one person inspires a movement, or her words do decades later; sometimes a few passionate people change the world; sometimes they start a mass movement and millions do; sometimes those millions are stirred by the same outrage or the same ideal and change comes upon us like a change of weather.

All that these transformations have in common is that they begin in the imagination, in hope.

To hope is to gamble.

It’s to bet on the future, on your desires, on the possibility that an open heart and uncertainty are better than gloom and safety.

To hope is dangerous, and yet it is the opposite of fear,

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for to live is to risk.

I say all this to you because hope is not like a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky.

I say this because hope is an ax you break down doors with in an emergency;
because hope should show you out the door,
because it will take everything you have to steer the future away from endless war,
from the annihilation of the earth’s treasures
and the grinding down of the poor and marginal.

Hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed.

Hope calls for action;
[and] action is impossible without hope.

We, as a congregation, are called to be a community of hope.

A place where we can hold truth and hope together, even when it is hard, and, arguably, because it is hard.

For this is something that no one person can do alone.

We need one another in this great endeavour.

We need others who can witness to the hope they’ve found along life’s way, when we forget, or when we can no longer seem to find it for ourselves.

Together, we can hold each other in the times of our frustration and despair, those times when we struggle with cynicism and anxiety,
because there will always be those among us who are, in any given moment, the bearers and bringers of our hope.

In a resilient community, in one able to weather the hard truths before us, this is a role that must rotate through our ranks, with each of us in our turn doing what we can to keep the fires of hope burning.

This will be all-the-more important as we journey together through a time of significant transition as a congregation, as we make the move from this home to another, with a possible interim stop along the way.

We can do this.

Together.

And we can grow stronger in the process.

When I look as far as I can into an uncertain future and imagine what the world will need in years to come, I keep returning to the belief that the world will need more communities like this—more communities like what we are striving to become.

A place where we are reminded again and again of our purpose and our promise.

A place where we experience the interconnected web of life in relationships we learn to nurture through acceptance, compassion, and understanding.

A place where we come to be renewed when our light grows dim.

A place where we come to help others that their light might shine.

Such a place does not depend on a geographical location.
For such a place lives in the hearts of all who make it so.

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May we strive on to be such a people.

A people of courageous, loving hope.