

# This Year, I Hope...

1 January 2006

Bible passage: John 10:10 (TEV)

(Jesus said) **“I have come in order that you might have life — life in all its fullness.”**

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**Sermon nugget:** This year, in 2006, may each of us know what it is to live our lives to the very fullest.

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## Message part 1:

Isn't it amazing that we're into another year already? I know that 2005 held many different kinds of experiences for all of us. For some of us, it was probably a year of sadness, change, loss and unsettledness. For others, it was a year of fresh starts, new beginnings and un-thought-of opportunities. For The Garden, it was a year of celebration, with a couple major events to mark my 20<sup>th</sup> year of ordination and The Garden's 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. Many of us marked some of those significant life moments in 2005.

Frankly, I'm always a little sad to see the old year end, although there have been years when I've been glad to see it go. Sometimes, on New Year's Eve, I have felt a sense of regret that all those hopes and dreams and aspirations weren't fulfilled in the year that's about to end.

On other year-end days, I've eagerly anticipated what lies ahead.

Now, the original title for today was “This year, I hope...” but we thought about changing it to just “This Year...” However, after thinking and praying about what to share on this New Year's Day, we decided to keep it as “This Year, I Hope,” because that's really what I want us to think about today. What do we hope this year will hold for us?

As I was considering this question, I realize that what I hope for each and every one of us in 2006 is contained in the Bible passage we have this morning. The words are from Jesus, and these are words I've always cherished and tried to live by. The verse found in the Gospel of John says it this way: **“I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness.”**

If I understand what Jesus is trying to say to us here, and I think I do, it's that we need to invest ourselves totally and completely in life. We're here to live on the edge, not to shy away from challenges. We're here to take some risks, to drink it all in, to be willing to go through the ups and downs, to know that life means being at times on the mountaintop, and at other times to be in the depths of darkness and despair, but to be willing to be there—fully and completely. Living life fully, in my estimate, is about being willing to engage in every dimension of life, to learn from it, to be in awe of it.

In face, I've decided that if Jesus were to speak the same thoughts today, he might say it more like an email one of you sent me a while back. I don't know the author, but this is

what it says: **“Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely, in a pretty and well-preserved body; but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming, Wow! What a ride!”** That's what I hope for each of us in 2006—that we will know what it's like to live life to the very fullest—that we can skid in broadside, thoroughly used up and totally worn out, shouting, “Wow! What a ride!”

Well, how do we go about living life this way? Probably for all of us, it will mean some changes in the way we look at our lives and the way we look at the world around us. Once we understand that life is a gift that's meant to be lived, we will know for ourselves what we have to change, but I have some thoughts that might help it along.

Actually, these thoughts are not original ones, but they came about as I was driving in my car. A song came on the radio. It's been out for a number of years and was both written and sung, I think, by Lee Ann Womack. The song is entitled “I Hope You Dance,” and as I listened to the words, I thought to myself how “on target” she was with what I was hoping for us all for 2006. So, using her lyrics as a sort of outline, let's consider what it might be like to live life to the fullest.

She begins by singing, **“I hope you never lose your sense of wonder,”** and in a couple of other places, she refers to the beauty and immensity of creation. It seems to me that this is a good starting point for breathing in the fullness of life.

You know, I fear sometimes that the electronic media at our disposal has robbed us of the ability to appreciate the real thing. We can travel via any cable or satellite channel or the Internet to the highest mountain, to the ocean, to the desert. It's become so life-like that we think we can almost feel and touch it, and yet...watching it isn't the same as being there.

Now, I know we don't have all the opportunity or desire to travel to the exotic places on our planet, but we can certainly take a venture into the outdoors right here in central Indiana, and appreciate what surrounds us. Even just looking at a leaf that's blowing about, or at a snowflake as it falls can renew that sense of the wonder and miracle of all of life and all of creation. Breathing in the cold air enlivens us in a way that nothing else can, so I have to agree with Womack. One of the things I hope for us all in 2006 is that we never lose our sense of wonder.

Linked very closely to that is something else Womack sings about. Her words are, **“May you never take one single breath for granted.”** The truth of these words has probably hit home to many of us this past week, as we watched and read the words of Coach Tony Dungy at the funeral service for their son. He urged everyone to tell those we love that we really love them, and not take them for granted. As the coach said, “We may never know when this will be the last chance to say it, or the last time to hug a loved one.

You see, we need to realize that every moment of every day is a true miracle, but most of us take much of it for granted. I know that I do. It's only when something or someone is gone from us that we realize how much the person or experience

meant, and then sometimes, it's too late to retrieve that particular moment.

However, it's never too late to retrieve a sense of gratitude and appreciation for all that comes to us packaged as life. We can begin today to look at those closest to us in a new way, really committing ourselves to value the way they are, the jokes they tell, the weird idiosyncrasies they exhibit. Let me tell you, every time I do a funeral service, I realize the kinds of things that people value and remember about a loved one who has died, and they are often the little things that we might well have forgotten had we not paid attention. So, for 2006, I hope that each one of us will refuse to take one breath, one person, one experience, one single thing for granted.

Something else that she talks about is love. She sings, "Lovin' might be a mistake, but it's worth making." She's right, you know. I'm well aware that some of us are afraid to love because it means that we might get hurt, or that we might lose that love. Certainly, all that is not just a possibility; it's a probability. However, if we never let ourselves love, we never really live. Remember the words of Alfred Lord Tennyson, who wrote, "It is better to have loved and lost, than to have never loved at all." So, in 2006, my hope for each of us is that we learn to love.

Lee Ann Womack captures the necessity for us to take risks if we're really going to live life to the fullest. She sings these words: "I hope you never fear those mountains in the distance; never settle for the path of least resistance; living might mean taking chances, but they're worth taking."

You see, living life fully means being willing to tackle the tough challenges that come our direction, and not cower away in fear. There will be mountains to climb for every one of us. Some of them will be health challenges; some will be job challenges; some will be relationship challenges; some will be parenting challenges. Life is filled with moments that push us toward what we think we cannot handle, but we have to be willing to try. It's better to face whatever comes to us as openly and honestly as we can, rather than kidding ourselves into believing that all of life is smooth sailing. It just doesn't work that way.

We're here to face whatever life brings us, and not try to take shortcuts around them, or employ any avoidance tactics. That can be risky business, because we just might fail. That's what prompted Tim McMahon to say, "Yes, risk-taking is inherently failure-prone. Otherwise, it would be called sure-thing-taking."

However, if we never take a chance, we never really live. If there aren't times when our hearts are pounding because we don't think we can do this or that, then we aren't really living. If we aren't ever scared or embarrassed, then we haven't really risked; we haven't really lived. As Geena Davis once said, "If you risk nothing; then you risk everything." If we're content to play it safe, then we need to realize that we're not really living the way God intended us to live. Therefore, my

wish for each of us in 2006 is that we will take a chance, take a risk; I hope that we will live!

**Video:** "Save the Last Dance"

## Message part 2

In the process of taking those chances, and trying to live life as fully as possible, there's another element that Womack includes. She sings, "When you come close to selling out, reconsider." When we're tempted to take short cuts, to muddling, to compromise our integrity in order to win, we're selling out. And when we sell out, we aren't being a person of character; we aren't being the kind of person we're created to be.

Remember, God made us all, and loves each one of us. Threads of God's goodness and love are part of our DNA. Therefore, a life lived fully is one where we always take the high road. It's where we insist on the right and just thing. It's where every word and deed is filled with love—God's love. That's being a person of character and integrity, and that's what I hope for each of us in 2006.

There's one more thing that Lee Ann Womack sings about in her song, and it has to do with our faith. She says, "Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance," and "Give the heavens above more than just a passing glance."

I'm pretty sure that there are some of us here this morning who are wondering just what on earth we're doing here. What is all this faith stuff? How is it real and what does it matter?

Those are all good and valid questions, and I don't know that I can say anymore than where I am personally on those issues. I'm no great mind or lofty theologian, but in my experience, a life without faith is like a ship without a rudder. There is no sense of direction; there's no sense of meaning.

For me, believing that there is a God and that life does matter has made a huge difference. It's given me a sense of purpose; it helps me get through each day; it gives me confidence when I'm down; it helps me face the moments when life feels as though it's shattered into a million pieces. Faith in God is what guides my life because I think it means living a life of love in every way I can, and for me, that changes everything.

Someone has defined faith as the act of leaning one's whole weight upon someone or something. That's what it's like for me. I'm leaning my whole weight upon God; actually, I'm betting my entire life that Love will win out.

Maybe I'm right; maybe I'm not. But either way, I think life is a whole lot better when we have faith—however we define it. So, for all of us in 2006, I hope we give faith a fighting chance.

## Closing:

As we leave here this morning, I hope and pray that this year, we will live life to the very fullest. I hope we dance!

Have a Happy New Year, and go in peace. Amen.