

## Harmony, Happiness and Hope—December 2017

What a year—*the good, the bad and the ugly!* Between politics, gun violence and massacres, Black-on-Black crime, and natural disasters, it's not always easy to experience harmony, happiness or have hope. Far too many people today are accepting a spirit of hopelessness, helplessness and fearfulness as their 'new normal'. They shrug off the depravity as, '*this is the world we live in today.*' And, while that may be true, the Bible reminds us that we may *live in* this world, but we are *not of* this world. With that in mind, I refuse to accept things as if my hands are tied behind my back. There's also the saying, '*if you don't like where you are, move; you are not a tree!*' In other words, we don't have to accept where we are or what's happening around us. Even if we can't change our environment, we have the power to do something differently. The 'move' we make may be as simple as changing our mindset or response to those things happening around us.

Sometimes the best way to get through the day is by refusing to watch or read the news and turning off social media. The ugliness and divisiveness of our country and this world have taken their toll on many of us—weighing us down with the issues of life. However, as children of God, we must refuse to let the world dictate our attitude, response or our future. I ask that you join with me and CHOOSE to focus on the **harmony, happiness and hope** that Christ desires for us and promised to us. Certainly, that promise came with a caveat because He also said that we "*will have trials and tribulations.*" Nevertheless, I challenge you that, if you know you are a new creation in Christ, say so and live as if you believe it!

If we—*children of God*—walk around looking hopeless, downtrodden and inviting people to our 'pity party', then how can we expect to bring harmony, happiness and hope into the world? Sure, there are days when just getting up and getting out can be a struggle, but if we take time to thank God for the things we take for granted—*our health, family, and the very breath that we breathe*—we have reasons to be thankful. Just being alive and 'clothed and in our right mind,' should give us reasons to rejoice, praise God and let our light shine in the world.

Ask yourself this: if you feel and look defeated, why should anyone want to get to know your God? We can bring others to Christ by refusing to look like what we've been through. We must learn how to live even though we are in a place that is subject to evil. Remember, no matter what the world says, we are victors—*kings and queens, heirs to the throne*—so adjust your crown, show up with a smile and let your light shine in the darkness of this world!

Our attitude must not be a reflection of what's happening around us. Yes, we grieve, we hurt, and we become discouraged. And, while I don't advocate wearing a mask, I do suggest that—*through our tears, pain and grief*—we must hang onto the hope that we have in and through Christ. The fact of the matter is, not many of us share our missteps with the world; we're too busy looking as if we have everything together. We could instill much more hope in others, by sharing our testimonies, being transparent, and helping

others to see the God in us, and helping them understand that He loves us and has shown Himself faithful to us, even 'in our stuff.' Others need to know that Christ is not looking for *perfection*. Our relationship with Christ is a process and all we can do is *strive for perfection*.

Repentance is just as important as righteousness, and someone needs to hear what God has brought us from. We must share with others that, in sin there are consequences, but God walks us through those consequences, letting us know that He's still 'got us'; He still loves us!

In this season of love, giving and remembrance, I encourage you to focus on the reason for the season, not the tangible or material things you receive. Instead of approaching God asking for something, try giving something to Him and others—demonstrating the love of Christ. You don't have to do something as grandiose as 'adopting a family' for Christmas—but try becoming a giver instead of a taker. Your gift may be something as simple as paying for the meal of the person behind you in a drive-through, raking leaves in the yard of an elderly person, baking cookies for your next door neighbor, or smiling and saying 'hello' to a stranger.

The true essence of Christianity, is learning to become more like Christ. When we do this, even if our circumstances don't change, we grow and look more like Him. The purpose of developing a strong relationship with Christ is not just an opportunity for us to get what we want from God, it's an opportunity to give Him praise, to listen to Him for guidance and direction, to thank Him and to imitate Him. We must learn to praise and thank God, even in our brokenness. Remember, broken crayons still color. What better time of the year to color the world with harmony, happiness and hope than this season of celebrating the birth of Jesus!

I leave you with an excerpt from Dr. Maya Angelou's poem, *Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem*:

It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time.  
On this platform of peace, we can create a language  
To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.

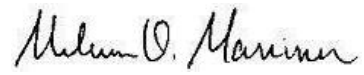
At this Holy instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ  
Into the great religions of the world.  
We jubilate the precious advent of trust.  
We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope.  
All the earth's tribes loosen their voices  
To celebrate the promise of Peace.

Peace. We look at our world and speak the word aloud.  
Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves,  
And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation.

Peace, My Brother.  
Peace, My Sister.

Peace, My Soul.

Peace and power,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melvin O. Marriner". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Peace and power,".

Dr. Melvin O. Marriner  
Senior Pastor Grove Church

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