

Horizonless Hope: A Syrian Theology of Persevering Faith

Every time I travel — whether it's a short trip inside Syria or a flight abroad — something very predictable happens.

I always choose the biggest suitcase I can find.

My wife always laughs and asks, “*Why do you need all of this? Are you going to the desert?*”

And I always answer, “*I don't know... maybe I'll need it.*”

It has become almost a family joke.

But deep inside, I know why.

Because for many Syrians, travel is never just travel.

It carries a hidden question — *What if I never come back because of any political reason?*

At airports, I always notice this small pattern:

Most travelers from other countries walk with light luggage.

But when I see someone struggling with two large suitcases, I smile quietly to myself and say, “*That one is probably Syrian.*”

It's not because we love hoarding tendency — it's because we have learned to live with uncertainty.

To always be prepared for the unexpected.

To pack not only what we need, but also what we *might* need — just in case life changes again.

And so, the heavy suitcase became, for me, a symbol —

a symbol of how we live in Syria,

and maybe, how we live as human beings in a world where certainty has disappeared.

We live in a time when tomorrow feels breakable.

We plan, but we don't always know if our plans will survive the night.

And that is where my story begins — in the space between hope and uncertainty.

For many years, Syria has lived in what I can only describe as *a permanent maybe*.

Maybe there will be peace.

Maybe there will be electricity tomorrow.

Maybe our children will have a future here — or maybe somewhere else.

We learned to live one day at a time, to hold our dreams carefully — like glass.

In the beginning, we used to say: “*One day this will end.*”

But after years of war and displacement, people stopped counting days.

We learned a new way of living — one where the horizon disappears, and you keep walking anyway.

But Is this experience only Syrian one?

It is shared by many in our world:

in Gaza, in Sudan, in Lebanon, in Ukraine,

in every place where people wake up not knowing what tomorrow will bring.

From this soil of uncertainty, something began to grow inside me — slowly, quietly — a new way of understanding faith and hope.

A theology born not from books or conferences,
but from the daily act of surviving with dignity.

I call it “**Horizonless Hope.**”

What does this mean?

Horizonless hope is hope practiced when the future is hidden.

It is the faith to keep walking when the road fades into fog.

It is not about seeing the light at the end of the tunnel —
it is about becoming the light inside the tunnel.

There is a quote by the Syrian playwright **Saadallah Wannous** that I always remember.
It says:

“We are condemned to hope.”

I think he meant that hope is not optional for us.

It is not a mood.

It is a survival skill.

It is the one thing that keeps us human when everything else collapses.

In Syria, I discovered that we are condemned not only to hope, but also to context.

We don’t get to choose peaceful times for our faith.

We live our theology *inside* the storm, not beyond it.

And that’s why I believe horizonless hope is not a luxury for good days.

It is the spiritual oxygen for bad ones.

It’s what keeps people caring, serving, and believing even when nothing makes sense.

It is not optimism — optimism expects things to get better.

Hope, in our experience, is something else.

Hope is the decision to remain faithful *even if* things don’t get better.

Sometimes, life looks exactly like **THIS PICTURE** —
a road fading into fog.

You don’t know where it leads.

You only know that you must keep walking.

That is horizonless hope.

There is one passage in the Bible that always speaks to me deeply —
Lamentations 3:21–23.

“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness”

These words were written after Jerusalem had been destroyed —
the city in ruins, the people exiled, the temple gone.

No horizon.

No plan.

No future.

And yet — this voice dares to say: “*I have hope.*”

This is the heart of horizonless hope.

It is not hope that denies pain — it speaks *through* pain.

It does not wait for the situation to improve — it creates meaning within the ruins.

Another story that always inspires me is **Abraham**.

The book of Hebrews says, “*He went out, not knowing where he was going.*”

Abraham’s journey began without a map.

Faith was not a GPS system; it was a relationship.

He trusted the One who called him, not the clarity of the destination.

And that is the same pattern we see again and again in Scripture —

God meets people *not at the end of the road*, but *within the fog*.

Moses in the wilderness.

Elijah in the cave.

The disciples in the storm.

In every case, hope is not the removal of uncertainty —
it’s the transformation of it.

It’s as if God is whispering:

“You don’t need to see the horizon.
You only need to trust that I walk beside you.”

This brings me to why I’m here —

because the theme of this Council is “**Persevere in Your Witness.**”

And I want to tell you:

Horizonless hope *is* perseverance.

It is faith that refuses to give up its testimony.

In Syria, perseverance looked very simple.

It looked like a pastor keeping the church open even when the congregation was three people.

It looked like Sunday School servants who continued to teach children in basements during bombing.

It looked like Elders who kept distribute aid to every one in the city even they don't trust their neighbors.

None of them knew if their work would change anything.

They simply believed that love was still worth practicing.

That is witness.

That is perseverance.

For me, *to persevere in witness* means to hold the light —
not **until** the dawn appears,
but **as** the light itself when the horizon is gone.

And maybe that is what the world needs from the church today.
Not louder doctrines, not bigger structures —
but communities that dare to hope without guarantees.
Churches that remain human, compassionate, and faithful
even when results are invisible.

Theology, then, is not about predicting the future.
It is about care for faith that can survive when the future disappears.

Let me return to the story I began with — the heavy suitcase.

Maybe I still pack too much,
because somewhere inside, I know that life is unpredictable.
Maybe I have accepted that I cannot control the horizon.
But I have also learned something deeper:
that even when we cannot see the destination,
we can still walk together.

Hope without horizon teaches us community —
because in the fog, no one walks alone.

And maybe this is what God is teaching the global church in our time:
to stop depending on certainty,
and start depending on one another — and on grace.

So my prayer for us, as we gather here,
is that we may learn this **theology of horizonless hope**:

To persevere not because we see the end,
but because we trust the One who walks beside us.

Because maybe — just maybe —
**hope without horizon is not the end of faith...
it is its purest form.**