

Tom Hoopes Remarks at Interfaith March and Vigil
September 19, 2026

[Start by singing the first verse of "How Can I Keep from Singing?"]

“What am I doing to be brave at this time?”

I ask myself that query every day in countless ways. Bravery is big and little, but mostly it's little. It's summoning the courage to look malice, or harm, or risk, or fear directly in the eye, and to summon my courage – which is to say, not to be fearless, but to have heart – and taking the next step.

My name is Tom Hoopes. My son Jacob was arrested last summer at gunpoint by the FBI, in connection with his actions protesting ICE. If you have ever met Jacob, or if you have seen the videos or listened to the podcast, you will likely agree that he is extraordinarily gentle, kind, and thoughtful.

This invitation to speak is personal to me, because this cause is personal to me. Jacob Hoopes is in prison, and Donald Trump is not. If that that makes you ask deep questions, hurts your heart and boggles your mind, welcome to my world.

What is going on in this country right now, with our leaders hurting so many people and stealing so many basic rights, is beneath contempt. And yet, here we are. As Joe Snyder so elegantly put it, “the U.S. population in general seems to have lost a sense of urgency about the terrible things that are happening in our country: I.C.E., environmental/land use horrors, racism, gay/trans oppression, etc.” Amen.

So, tonight, we are gathered to rekindle our sense of urgency, and to do so from a place of faith. Interfaith. We who are gathered here tonight for this Interfaith Vigil and March come from diverse world views and diverse spiritual and religious orientations. But I think we agree that all people are sacred, that it is not okay to systematically harm other people, especially the most vulnerable among us. And it is not okay to lie, and then double-down on the lies by trying to buy your way out of it. NO. Enough is enough.

So, why did Jacob get arrested by the FBI? And why is he now serving time in a federal prison? Excellent questions.

To make a long story short, Jacob showed up. After the first No Kings March, he marched with the crowd to the ICE facility, and he encountered people screaming, “They are tear-gassing us!” Rather than run away, Jacob went TOWARD danger. In his own words: “I felt like there was some responsibility to push back and to make it so that the ICE agents who were antagonizing folks and inflicting violence on folks weren't able to do so unopposed.” After being tear-gassed and shot with pepper balls, he over-reacted, by his own admission, and threw some rocks. The rest of the story is contested and complicated, and not why I am speaking to you tonight.

There are parts of Jacob's story that are specifically relevant to tonight's Interfaith Vigil. To wit: ICE is a problem. No, wait. That's not strong enough. ICE is a moral scourge. No, wait, that's still not strong enough. ICE is an ABOMINATION. And ICE is right here, in our city, and in our state. ICE increased detentions in Oregon over the summer and they don't appear to be slowing down. Quoting the impeachment articles introduced to the House of Representatives earlier this week, this

administration is operating “vicious, quota-driven, unaccountable paramilitary forces killing people.” Yes, that is precisely what is happening.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, stated in his now-famous *Letter from Birmingham Jail*: “Everything Hitler did was legal.” Here is the fuller quotation: “We should never forget that everything Adolph Hitler did in Germany was ‘legal’ and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was ‘illegal.’ It was ‘illegal’ to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany.”

Yes, indeed: Everything Donald Trump is doing is technically legal, until the courts and we, the people, STOP HIM. National leaders have approved this abomination. But history will look back on this chapter with grim consternation. And we, the people, have the opportunity to change the tide of history.

Jacob has responded to his situation with grace, dignity, courage, and creativity. In prison, he is befriending people across all boundaries of race and religion and class, writing voluminously, maintaining a disciplined schedule, and designing and helping to build a hydroponic gardening system in the prison greenhouse. He is noticing that so many do not have the support in prison that he has, and he has asked that more of us get to know actual people incarcerated.

In addition, thanks to Jacob, lots and lots of people who are currently not in prison – that includes all of us, folks! 😊 – are engaging in spirit-led actions of their own choosing to make the world a better place. That’s right, at our website, www.900DaysofLight.com, people are adopting one of his days of imprisonment, and doing concrete acts of service, activism, and community-building, and then writing to him to tell him all about it. People are volunteering at soup kitchens, making homemade food for people experiencing homelessness, picking up litter on the roadsides, going to City Council meetings to advocate for public transit, providing care to people experiencing illness, going to the personal pilgrimage sites and then telling others about it, and so many more creative actions. One person from Pennsylvania wrote, “Thank you for inspiring me to go bigger this time. It was really nice to be able to support my neighbors facing food insecurity in your family's honor.”

People all over the world are taking actions. So far we have participants from Denmark, Mexico, Canada, Australia, England, Sweden, and the USA.

When he was released after 4 days in jail last July, not knowing what he was accused of, Jacob’s first words to me were: “This is all about intimidation. If we aren’t intimidated, we win.” Thank you, Jacob, for your wisdom and your bravery.

And so I will conclude by asking again: “What am I doing to be brave at this time?”

I call on us this evening to follow Jacob’s example, and the example of so many others who have courageously protested ICE, to transform a hurtful and vindictive experience into one of courageous transformation. For those who are so led, I have brought packets of postcards to be mailed to people in swing states who are inconsistent voters. We want to encourage them to vote, because we know – precisely as the billionaires know – that the more people who vote, the more likely we are to reclaim our democracy. This is a very small action step, but hopefully it will motivate us to take additional steps.

Please join me. [*Songlead a rousing version of “This Little Light of Mine.”*]