



Hope Keeps Something Alive in Us

Hope is a responsibility.

One that should widen the circle of concern.

A Private Conversation with Ashley Laverne Jackson at JW3 · July 29, 2026

My arrival in London today begins the second half of a two-week journey across Europe—the first of what I have named the HOPE Missions, in honor of my father, Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr.

I came on behalf of PUSH The Next Generation, the organization I lead, to bear witness to the struggles that shaped the last century and to ask what they require of the next: to recover the international legacy he spent six decades building, to sit with people across communities who are asking how solidarity holds under strain, and to engage the global coalition this work has always needed.

For most of my life, I heard my father close speeches, sermons, interviews—and even the most ordinary of conversations—with the same exhortation: "Keep Hope Alive." The phrase became so familiar that its radical demands could disappear beneath the sound of it.

Then, in February, he passed away. I have begun to hear his words differently—listening now from inside my own grief.

In the months since, I have been living inside what our Jewish tradition calls, with such tenderness, a house of mourning. Long before I completed my conversion, I had already begun to mourn Jewishly. Week after week, on Shabbat, I whispered my father's name during the Mi Shebeirach. Afterward, I stood in that same sanctuary and said Kaddish, and a congregation answered me.

Before I learned many of the other dimensions of Jewish practice, I understood this: that grief is not meant to remain solitary, that it is meant to be carried, witnessed, and shared. My own mourning has not made me an authority on suffering; it has, however, altered the way I encounter it. My grief has enlarged my capacity to see the sorrow other people carry.

That is the person who arrived in Europe six days ago.

Over the past week, I have traveled from Paris to Amsterdam and now to London, immersing myself in the intertwined histories of empire and resistance, faith and doubt, violence and human dignity—histories that have shaped not only this continent but also the moral architecture of the modern world. I have spent my days in archives and museums, churches and synagogues, in conversation with historians and clergy, scholars and artists, and with young people.

In Paris, I traced the histories of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, confronting the bureaucratic machinery by which the unimaginable, rendering African lives as cargo and commerce, was made to appear merely administrative. I listened to people who have given their lives to the recovery of stories that others labored to erase. I have wept more in these six days than I had anticipated. I have wept over atrocities I knew well, and over atrocities I had never before encountered. I have wept not only at what human beings have proven capable of doing to one another, but because to stand in the very places where these histories unfolded is to watch the comfortable distance between then and now collapse.

Then I walked into the Secret Annex, where the Frank family hid during World War II, and where Anne Frank wrote the diary the world would not read until after her death.

Here was a young girl living under conditions that defy comprehension, and still, she continued to write. I found myself wondering how one continues writing when their future remains entirely uncertain.

This journey bears my father's imprint in its very name. Yet it was not until I stood in Anne's room that I heard those words again with a force I could not ignore: "Keep Hope Alive." There, I realized that hope is often misunderstood. We have a tendency to speak of it as though it were optimism, as though it were merely confidence that things will improve. But Anne's diary survived precisely because hope is something deeper than certainty.

Hope works in two directions. Yes, we are called to keep hope alive—but hope also keeps something alive in us. It preserves our capacity to imagine beyond the walls that confine us. It sustains the conviction that cruelty need not have the final word. It refuses to let suffering become the measure of what it means to be human. And if hope keeps alive something essential within us, then hope is not simply a gift we receive. It is also a responsibility we bear. What, then, does hope ask of us?

For me, the answer begins with one of the most radical propositions in Torah—a passage I first encountered through the theological inheritance of the Black church.

The commandment to love our neighbor is well known. The one that follows it in the same chapter is lesser: "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love 'them' as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

What has always captivated me is the logic of that commandment. The memory of our own suffering is not offered as warrant for an exceptional concern with ourselves; it is offered as the very ground of our obligation to someone else. Our wounds were never meant to become walls. They were meant to become bridges. Hope widens the circle. It refuses to let our compassion end where our identities begin.

Perhaps that is why, throughout this journey, I have found myself attending to another history, one that runs quietly alongside the history of human cruelty. It is the history of those who widened the circle when every force around them demanded that they narrow it. It is the history of those who concealed

strangers from danger, preserved forbidden memory, and crossed the boundaries of race and religion, of nation and tribe, because they refused to believe that another person's suffering lay outside the circle of their own concern. It is the history of those who chose responsibility over indifference and solidarity over fear. That history lives in those who fought and resisted enslavement and colonization, in those who sheltered Jews during the Shoah, and in the communities I have met across Paris, Amsterdam, and now London, who continue to insist that memory is not only the preservation of the past but the shaping of the future.

It is also a history that demands something of us now.

Three weeks ago, an eighteen-year-old named Nolan Xavier Wells disappeared along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Multiple autopsies have since been conducted since his body was recovered, yet his family still has not been told how their son died. Consider what it means to grieve a child while still waiting to learn what happened to him—to confront not only an unbearable loss, but also the haunting possibility that the delay itself reflects the unequal value our society assigns to certain lives.

Last Thursday, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, a fifty-year-old man named Moshe Yezhak Grunhaus was stabbed in the chest as he stepped out of his synagogue, one of two men wounded in that area within minutes of one another. He had spent the evening observing Tisha B'Av, a day devoted to remembering ancient tragedies, and was attacked on his walk home, still wearing his kippah.

Neither of these stories reaches me as a distant headline.

In one, I recognize myself as an African-American. In the other, I recognize myself as a Jew. But it should not take being both.

I have come to believe that one of the great failures of our age is not a lack of information about suffering—we are inundated with it—but that we have grown practiced at deciding whose wounds we will carry and whose we will leave unattended. We have organized our moral lives around ever-smaller circles of concern until we scarcely notice that we are drawing them at all.

I belong to two traditions whose histories are profoundly different and which I love beyond measure: the African tradition into which I was born and the Jewish tradition into which I have come. I would never collapse them into one another. But I believe our destinies are intertwined. Both know what it is to carry memory across generations. Both know what it is to endure persecution without surrendering joy, or learning, or family, or faith, or hope. And both have given the world a moral vision that insists our own suffering can never become the boundary of our compassion.

I began this journey believing that hope was something we are called to keep alive. I now believe that hope is also what makes solidarity possible—across grief, across difference, across history itself. The question is whether we will answer its call.