

“Rethinking Christmas: Having HOPE”

Psalm 33:20-22, Romans 15:13

November 27, 2016, 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent

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I love Christmas!!!! Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent means “to come.” The expectation, the waiting, the hoping for a Savior to come that expectation, that waiting that hoping began with the Old Testament prophets.

Even the Psalmist talks of the power of this hope. “Our soul WAITS for the Lord.” Why....because “He is our help and shield.” “Our heart is glad in Him...” Why? Because we trust in His Holy name.

Advent begins 4 Sundays before Christmas...by the way you will notice on the back of the bulletin we have added another Candlelight Communion Service this year and also it indicates the time of our Worship on Christmas and New Year’s Day. The Psalmist says, “Let your steadfast love be upon us....even as we hope in You.” Hope not in sales, not in people, Presidents, or Pastors...hope not in material things....not in position or possessions...but our hope is in You---God.

The hope we are talking about is more than just fanciful wishes. For example:

I ‘hope’ the service doesn’t go long today I’ve got some more shopping to do.

I ‘hope’ Aaron Rogers has great football game today, because he is on my Fantasy Football team.

I ‘hope’ that Sarah will fix me a 5 course meal this evening.

I ‘hope’ I win the lottery. (that’s a hope lost because I don’t play the lottery)

Oh it would be great if hope was in our hands (**IMAGE**).

Well, hope is in our hands, and yet it isn’t in our hands. Let me explain. From our Advent Reading from John 1---In Him was life. In Him was light. And I would expound and say, In Him we hope.

Traveling back from Jacksonville for Thanksgiving with all 3 grandkids...and number 4 coming in a couple of weeks....I saw a sign from a restaurant that basically said, “Ho-ho-hope you eat with us.” Ho---ho-ho...By the way you know why Santa likes to work in the garden...because he likes to Hoe, hoe, hoe.

Our ho-ho-hope is not in a magical figure, but in a mysterious and mystical figure. One that was to be born in a manger. We wait, we hope. So hope is really not in our hands...but in the hands of that one who is to come. And yet as we put our hands in His hands...we have His hope. Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us!

I recently read Max Lucado’s latest book, “Because of Bethlehem...Love is Born, Hope is Here.” He relates the following story:

“We can relate to the little boy who played the part of the angel in the Christmas story. He and his mother rehearsed his lines over and over: “It is I; don’t be afraid.” “It is I; don’t be afraid.”

Yet, when the Christmas pageant began, he walked onto the stage and saw the lights and audience and he froze. After an awkward silence, he finally said, “It is me and I’m scared.” (page 7, Lucado, *Because of Bethlehem*)

We need hope....it’s me and I’m scared. I need to have hope in my hands. I need to put my hands in Jesus’ hands.

GodRodz did a fantastic job with the Newsboys song “We Believe.” Did you catch some of the words. “In this time of desperation when all we know is doubt and fear.”

Oh friends, there is only One than can give us true hope in these times of desperation.

So we have our hopes:

I hope God is with me when I face troubles and have hard times.

I want to have hope for tomorrow but sometimes peer pressure and stress is great.

I hope God brings unity in my family.

Oh, there is only One that will bring salvation....only One hope....He was to come in a manger.

Charles Wesley, the brother of the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, wrote the words of more than 6,000 hymns. One of those hymns we sang today. “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus.” A song we typically sing on 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent....deals with expectation and waiting. We sang, “Hope of all the earth thou art, dear desire of every nation joy of every longing heart.”

A little trivia...Charles Wesley also wrote the words of another Christmas Carol: “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” So you see Christmas is very Methodist. Ha....Christmas should be very Christ centered!

So this sermon series we are not just ‘thinking Christmas,’ not just ‘thinking about Christmas,’ but re-thinking Christmas. It not past tense...but active....re-thinking how what happened so many years ago effects our life today. What? The story and message behind the Incarnation and coming of Jesus effects our life today. Yep. And I’m so glad. Rethinking Christmas: Having Hope.

Eugene Peterson who wrote *The Message Bible* also had this to say, “Hopping does not mean doing nothing...It is the opposite of desperate and panicky manipulations, of scurrying and worrying. And hoping is not dreaming. It is not spinning an illusion or fantasy to protect us from our boredom or our pain. It means a confident, alert expectation that God will do what he said he will do. It is imagination put in the harness of faith. It is a willingness to let God do it his way and in his time.” (from “A Long Obedience in the Same Direction”, quoted on page 148 in Lucado’s book, *Because of Bethlehem*)

Oh and we wait, we long, we anticipate, we expect, we HOPE. “May your steadfast love be upon us even as we hope in you.” (Psalm 33:22)

Yes this season is about Hope. **(HOPE IS BORN)**

That's the image I'm talking about....Woo-hoo.....Hope is born!!!!

Lucado says, "In spite of sin and scandal, Christ came.

In spite of racism and sexism, Christ came.

Though the people forgot God, Christ came.

In spite of, and out of, the pandemonium, Christ came." (page 41, Because of Bethlehem)

That's what I'm talkin' about! Hope is born because Christ came.

Rethinking how Christmas can give us hope. Having hope---because we cannot do it by ourselves.

Having Hope because this Jesus was God in the flesh.

Having Hope because this was Emmanuel----God with Us.

Having Hope because this is the one that was promised. God did what He said He would do.

Having Hope because I cannot place my hope in people or things of this world.

Our God is a God of hope...Who wants to fill you with hope, joy and peace. God want us to abound, persevere---He want s us be people having hope.

Find a reason every day to have hope. Every day. Often in the work week we call Wednesday "Hump day." Middle of the week. What about rather than Hump Day we had Hope Days...not just Wednesday but every day. Why do you have hope today? Huh, huh, huh.

I have hope because I know that as flawed and broken an I am....as much as I try and still can't get it right....when my humanity shows its ugly side....I am going to be having hop because as I am Rethinking Christmas I know that the Savior who came in the manger came to save me from my self, save me from society, and save me from stress. Any hope I have in my hands I want to put in His hands.

What does your heart hope for? Is your deepest longing God's glory...His presence.

Oh God we put our hope in you alone. Jesus is our living hope.

His presence....having hope...from manger to heart...to the cross.

Oh to be overcome by His presence this Advent and Christmas Season. To be overcome by Having Hope this season. To be overcome by realizing we can find at least one thing every day to have hope. A hope that the world does not give.

(video from SermonSpice, “Hope” <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/60928/hope>)

Romans 15:13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”