

Christ Church *Sermons*

Second Sunday of Advent, December 9, 2007

The Reverend Dr. Winston B. Charles

Isaiah 11:1-10,22-28; Psalm 72:1-7,18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

Hope for the Heart of a Vital Life

Today we conclude our preaching series on God's gift of Hope, one of the primary Christian virtues. To consider hope in its many dimensions has been most interesting. If you have not heard all of the sermons, the hope sermons are found on the Christ Church website and also in the lobby. I particularly encourage you to read Nancy's sermon from last week on The Hope of Heaven.

Today I want to conclude our series by reporting to you on the cards you filled out as you considered the question: What do you hope for? We clergy wanted to give you opportunity to consider this vital part of the Christian life, and it seems you have done just that. Each card received we honor as a prayer to God. Today we place them all on the altar as part of our corporate prayers. Thank you for considering hope these past weeks. May the hope that rests in Christ more and more provide your day-to-day living with ground to stand on, courage and vitality to live by, and a vision of God's grace that draws you into God's future for your life.

I very roughly grouped the cards into general categories. The top three categories are hope for a deeply spiritual life, hope for family, hope for peace, an end to war and strife, a safe return of our men and women in harm's way.

Many other areas, of course, are of great interest. I had to go to Google to find out about two new toys that some child hopes for: A Wow Wee Roboquad, described as "a futuristic friend that is house-trained," is a sort-of four clawed crab-like computer toy that moves on its own around the house and whose personality can be adjusted into

differing degrees of awareness, activity, or aggression – to fit you mood for the day, I presume. And, a computer pet I-Dog comes in purple, pink, red Spider Man, black Spider Man, or as an I-Cat or an I-Penguin, a pet much less demanding than a real dog – batteries not included.

There were a couple sports related hopes submitted by children or the young in heart. “For (the) Greenbay (Packers) to get in the Super Bowl and win.” I accused Barbara of submitting this since she is such a Packers fan. And there is one for NC State to win the basketball championship. Go Wolfpack!

There were some hopes for our worship: “more familiar hymns at all services” and “a heating and air conditioner that works properly” (obviously written on the Sunday when we all were freezing in the church).

Several hope for a deeper understanding and care of our planet. A child wrote, “Global Warming: For everything to be all right. (Polar Bears).” An adult prayed for “a coordinated effort, involving all peoples of the Earth, to preserve a really nice planet.”

There were a number hoping for health care for all. “I hope for a time when every person in this country will have access to health care.”

Many hoped for more personal healing and health for themselves, their families, ones they loved.

“for my dad to receive a healthy heart,”

for a friend’s “recovery from breast cancer (and all women facing this),”

for the healing of a mentally retarded child and “the peace of the Lord as that does not happen,”

for health and happiness and long life for me and my family.

Healing of relationships and a desire for authentically loving relationships were significant hopes for many:

a reconciliation with my daughter,
a better relationship with my sister,
honesty in people's exchanges with each other,
a loving marriage,
an intimate companion,
"a companion in my golden years,"
that God may be with us to help balance our budget,
a feeling of belonging in our new community,
generational healing (which is healing hurts passed on from generation to generation so that the cycle is broken).

Not surprisingly, family was one of the top areas; often parents expressed hope for their children's lives and faith:

"[a] healthy birth of our first baby,"
"that our children will grow up to be kind, caring, thoughtful, and sincere people, filled with the love of the Lord,"
that "the children will hope for more than 'wealth',"
that "my children learn the love of Jesus and show that love in their lives,"
"I hope that my son...will grow in wisdom and stature and in faith in God and that I use the gifts given me to teach him to hope for the same."

Some children weighed in with their hopes for their families:

"love from my parents, which I already have; I hope for greatness in my year,"

"my family's well being; the brave soldiers in harm's way will return to their families in good health; my friends' smiles will always be there; my dog will always love me",

for "love, time, living, home, Webkinz,"

"for my dog to live for a long time,"

"I hope for happiness, love and fun with my family!!!"

Anxiety over the war in Iraq and Afghanistan and the other places of unrest in the world was on the hearts of many. One of the most frequent hopes expressed by adults and children alike was for a true and lasting peace in the world.

A child wrote, "All the soldiers to come back from war."

An adult wrote, "For strength for the families of the men and women serving in the military and the hope their loved ones will return safely and be able to have a productive life after the trauma of war."

"I hope for peace on earth. I hope for all of God's children to live in peace and have dignity in their lives. I hope that all of God's children can live without fear of harm from others."

"I hope for the comfort of peace in a world admittedly powerless over its own violence and hatred. I hope for courage of love in a world in submission to God's powerful command to love self, neighbors, and enemies. I hope for the strength of the collective acts of a world of peace-seekers and enemy-lovers."

Rightly so, hope for a vital spiritual life was high on the list for many:

"I hope that the Kingdom of God is no less than what I believe it to be,"

"for becoming more aware of what it means to a child of God,"

"that all people will reach their potential, find serenity, and love God as [God] loves them,"

"to be the person God wants me to be,"

"the grace to be thankful for what I already have,"

"to have less and give more so that I can share the wealth with the world,"

"real lasting change for those things that need changing in my life,"

"a peaceful and tranquil heart,"

"that I may be less self-centered and express love to those I love and to those I find difficult to love,"

"to give of myself to others in a useful and kind and thoughtful way,"

"never lose my trust in God's love."

"to make a positive impact on our community and the world through with my career,"

"more love and acceptance of people that are different in their belief and lifestyle,"

"everyone to follow God by showing compassion and tolerance of all people,"

"full acceptance of all people in the church, regardless of race, income, social status, or sexual orientation,"

"reconciliation with the Anglican Communion."

A child wrote, "I hope that all the homeless and poor get help. I also hope that animals at shelters get adopted."

Three final hopes offer an appropriate conclusion to our prayers of hope. More than one adult linked the peace of the world with our own

inner peace; this one prayed for "The peace that passes all understanding, in the world, in this country, state and community, in the lives of family, friends and all peoples, in my life, and in my death."

Two final hopes come for the children. "I hope for LOVE!" Finally, three words simply said, "To see God."

Indeed, may we all see God in our hearts, in our lives, in our worship at this altar, in one another, in the world, for here is our never-failing source of hope.

During the past weeks, we expressed in many different ways how the place of hope in our lives. Hope is the anecdote for anxiety. Hope is our prayer for the future. Hope is an energizing force in the present. Hope is a gift from God that lifts us out of darkness into light and life.

This is the hope that comes only from God, as our hymn for these weeks proclaims:

*All my hope on God is founded,
he doth still my trust renew,
me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown, he alone
calls my heart to be his own.*

The Advent season is filled with the hope of God as we look forward to celebrating God's coming among us as the Christ Child. Paul words they first-century Christian community in Rome are just as valid to us today as a promise and a blessing:

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit." [Romans 15:13]

Amen. Amen.