

What is it that you most hope for? What is one thing you really wish for, long for, want to see happen? Better health? New job? Family peace? Financial security? People like us hope for all kinds of things.

Some of our hopes are pretty humble. We hope for good weather, a good grade on a test, better gas prices at the pump, a decent Christmas tree despite the big tree shortage. I hope the Detroit Lions win a Super Bowl in my lifetime. Actually, that's not such a humble hope, is it?

Some of our hopes are even bigger and much loftier, though. We hope for a worldwide conclusion to this crazy pandemic. We hope to see racism and injustice diminish in our land. We hope for sensible, equitable solutions to poverty, homelessness, and hunger. We hope for civility and mutual respect to be prevalent in the halls of our government, and between political parties. We hope for fulfilling, happy lives for our families and loved ones.

We have all kinds of hopes in this world, don't we? What is it that you most hope for?

What is it that Christian people like us should hope for? Should the hopes of Christians differ from the hopes of everybody else out there? Should we feel guilty about some of our hopes, the ones that are focused the things of this world? Should our hopes be more selfless, more holy?

Look, there's nothing wrong with hoping for good things and positive changes in this life. But should all our hopes revolve around the life we're living in this present world? What is it that Christians like us should hope for most of all?

Our Epistle Lesson for today talks about hope. God's Word teaches us that that our most fervent, most important hopes are found in Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit inspired St. Paul to write this letter to his friend Titus. In chapter two, Paul reminds the young pastor, Titus, of some fundamental Christian living principles for older men and women, for younger women and men, even for Christians who are bondservants or slaves.

And then Paul makes this strong and striking point. He makes it clear, in verses 11-14, that all of our Christian living, no matter what your age or station in life – and all of our Christian hopes – flow from our relationship with Jesus Christ. Our day-to-day Christian lifestyles, and the most significant hopes we carry around in our hearts and minds, should have everything to do with Christ.

What is it that you most hope for? God's Word teaches us today: *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup> training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, <sup>13</sup> waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,...*

Again, there's nothing wrong with you and me hoping for health, happiness, and football success in this life. Many of us have struggles and pains in this life that are serious, and excruciating; and it's only right that we aim our prayers and hopes in these directions. But the Bible teaches us today that, for Christians -- for those of us who know the love of Christ – we can have even higher hopes, even more glorious hopes, absolutely blessed hopes, as well.

After all, "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people." Paul is writing here about the greatest miracle of all time: the Incarnation of God himself. Our God has in

his heart this infinite, incomprehensible love for our fallen race. It's not a love we deserve, but it's a real love. We call this kind of love grace. And this grace of God became visible, when God took on human flesh. The Son of God became a human, in order to save humanity from our sins. In a few short weeks, we'll celebrate the birth of Christ again at Christmas. But every day, for the Christian, God's grace impacts our lives, impacts our choices and actions, impacts even our hopes.

See, Jesus didn't just come to save us, and then leave us alone. "God's grace appeared," Paul writes, "training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions." God expects the Incarnation miracle to make an impact on your everyday morals and values, and on mine. For those forgiven and saved by Christ, we are called to make a visible break with the morals and values of the world around us. "Renounce ungodliness," God says. "Say 'no' to worldly passions," God expects. Not that we can fight these battles solo. But "the grace of God has appeared," and Christ himself is training us – working through the power of his Word and Sacraments, empowering us by the gifts of his Holy Spirit, who dwells in our very hearts – training us to renounce more and more of the world's ways, and helping us "to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives" instead.

So those who follow Christ perhaps have some different hopes than everyone else in the world. We don't have any less problems, or face any fewer trials. We're still going to hope for all the same, normal things everyone else does. But we hope also for this new way of living that Christ came to bring us. We hope to see the world as Christ sees it, to love our neighbors as Christ loves us. We hope to keep faith with God who's always faithful to us. We hope for his grace to impact and change our sin-afflicted lives for the better. We hope for greater spiritual courage and strength as Christian disciples.

And all these hopes are found in Christ. These hopes come true in Christ. These hopes only happen in us because of Christ. The Son of God, who came into our flesh, who saved our souls, he is now training us to let go of the world and to live more and more for him. Our hope, as Christians, truly is, ultimately is, in him.

And then there is one more supreme hope that we Christians have. We wait “for our blessed hope,” when the Lord Jesus returns, “the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” That is the Christian’s highest, incomparable hope. For on that day, when Christ returns, all the world’s wars and pains and evils will come to an end. All our personal tribulations and suffering will cease. When the Lord returns, all of sin’s destructive effects will conclude, for eternity, for you, for me, for those who are in Christ.

What is it that you most hope for? Today, as always, our hope is in Christ, in whom the grace of God appeared. Until he appears again, we place all our hope for this life and for eternity in him.

In the name of Christ, who is our hope. Amen.