

December 5 & 6, 2020

“The Quilt of Hope”

Rev. Liz Whitford

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:3-5

I'd like to share a story with you. This story is one you might have heard before. This story shadows between despair and hope, and ultimately brings an altogether hope.

Once upon a time, there was a young woman who was a very ordinary. She did not have a stunning personality. She did not have beauty that took all by surprise. She was simply just a girl. The thing that made her different, however, was something that no one else had ever experienced, and that no one would again. She was chosen by God to birth an incredibly special baby.

As time progressed, this young woman, Mary, along with her soon-to-be-husband, felt the pressure of being different. There were times of despair. All of Mary's hopes and dreams of being a normal Jewish mother and wife, were wiped out by one conversation. The despair of potentially not being accepted by her future husband for her decision to serve God. The despair of not being able to stay at their own home for the birth of their child. The despair could have been in every step...all before Jesus was even born. It could have been quite hopeless, painful, and desolate. But, there was hope found as well. (I'm just going to wait to share it with you.)

Our scripture was written for those who were persecuted, but also was written for any needing some hope. Now, I do not know about you, but these last 9 months have seemed to be the strangest to maintain or have hope. We've seen something off in the distance impact countries outside of our own. We've seen as our own country has shut down in attempts to flatten the curve of hospitalizations. We've seen those numbers continue to rise with many being pandemic-ed out and yet we still sing, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive, Israel”

This scripture, preached only a few months ago is brought again to us, reminding us that we have a “living hope”. We are reminded of “the new birth”, of the “inheritance”; both “revealed in the last time”. Advent isn't just about Jesus coming the first time to earth to take away our sins. Advent is about that waiting period of time that we face until Jesus comes again.

This Advent we not only look forward to the looking back of Jesus's birth, but we yearn for that time when we no longer must worry about pandemics, presidencies, injustices, and violence. Instead we can BE present in the time when Jesus returns, and we are reunited fully with God.

In this week's reading of the Advent Study there was a particular image that I think can speak to all of us, a quilt of hope. In one place or another, we have seen a quilt. We have seen how small squares are put together to form beautiful patterns, tiny pieces that when put together provide warmth. Think of these little pieces as being people's experiences in life. As we look at each other's squares do we notice common threads of hope that we have experienced? Would another person's hope or despair square teach us something new about God?

Even if many people brought together their despairs of this time, together there can be some hope that is found. Sometimes we need someone else to find our hope in order for us to recognize it. Other times we can find that hope for someone else. We can find that altogether hope, that quilt of hope if we are pursuing the light relentlessly in the midst of the darkness.

Last week, Pastor Markus encouraged us to give what peace we have (even if it's only a little) to others. This week, I want to encourage you, even in the despair that we face, to find how we can sew a quilt of hope together. A hope that warms our souls knowing that in Jesus we have more than this life. We have a baby who turned into a man, who saved us from our sins.

Mary's story, the story of the young woman who faced much despair, could have remained in despair, but instead it brought hope to all. She wasn't disowned by her future husband for making a choice to be the Son of God's mother. Joseph, instead, took care of his bride and her baby. They found themselves in despair at time, in pain at time, but they found their hope, through God.

Where in your quilt of life experiences will you find your living hope that brings you your inheritance in the coming age? Or in other words, where do you find your hope today? IN the despair that we find in the world, is it Jesus where we look?

*“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus
Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart”*

Amen.