

SUNDAY, December 1 2024 Looking for Hope?

Jeremiah 33: 14-16 | Thessalonians 3:9-13 Luke 21: 25-36

It is the first Sunday of Advent and as Jesus teaches the disciples about what is around them, we too are looking for something amazing to happen. As Christians we believe that Jesus the Son of God was born of Mary many years ago and his purpose was to bring life and hope to all people. God saw that people needed a Saviour, one to whom they would listen and learn about how to live and love others. And Jesus was the One whom the prophets wrote about hundreds of years before his birth story came into play. So when we think about Jesus' story of his birth - it was not by circumstance but truly a fulfillment of prophecy as God inspired many to tell of the One who would save them and offer to them and to us the gift and hope of eternal life.

When we say we are hopeful, or looking for something with hope just what are we doing? Later in his life, Jesus taught the disciples about what it means to be hopeful by looking for signs and believing. Signs of life and new life all around us. This is difficult for us as we now experience a blanket of snow on lawns, fields, and with the trees now bare of leaves. And yet we look for signs of new life. Yet we believe in life continuing because every night we go to bed to rest from the day's adventures. But we have no assurance that we will wake up alive the next morning. Yet we all set alarm clocks to ring at a specific time the next day. This is hope.

There are signs for us about Jesus being born into our lives once again. But what are these signs? Yes we know the commercialism of the season began just after Halloween but the signs that this is an important time for Christians are still there. We prepare the sanctuary for reflection upon Advent with the focus on the nativity scene. The choir is rehearsing songs that reflect the Advent season and what will be Christmas Eve. The HUGS Barrel is getting filled with gifts to help others in need. Yet we also know that right now the manger in front of the communion table is empty. We are waiting. This is what Advent calls us to do- to stop, be patient, reflect, act, prepare and most importantly wait with expectant hope that there is something worth celebrating coming soon! God is involved and it is worth the wait!

Our reading from the prophet Jeremiah 33 expresses the idea that there would come a Saviour born from the line of David, that is a descendent in the family tree who would be considered the One sent by God. This descendent is considered the Righteous Branch, the part of the family of God which is the Messiah. This Messiah will execute justice and righteousness in the land saving Judah and enabling Jerusalem to live in safety.

The signs Jesus describes to the disciples include situations changing with the sun, moon, stars, and Earth. Other signs will be seeing people fearful and foreboding of what is coming, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. The signs point out losses, destruction and chaos. But this is not what we are looking for. We are looking for hope. Sometimes hope is hiding in the darkness. Sometimes it is hard to see; yet it is always there we just need to find it.

Like bulbs underground the snow and winter winds, there will come a time when the sun warms the bulbs up and they will bloom again. Or tree branches like the fig tree Jesus mentions, in the spring the leaves will sprout with new life. Or even when the cocoon rests on a hidden branch-- it will open again with new life. All of these are signs of hope.

When we find hope, our inner fears will end. This hope will keep us going when times get tough and rough or when we need to focus on something we need to do. Even the bad things become bearable because hope makes them disappear. But we cannot give up. The world may speak to you warning words of "no" but when you hear that little voice inside you saying 'maybe'-- that is hope!

Why is it important to have hope? Because hope brings us life.

There is a story about a pregnant deer in the forest. She is looking for a place to give birth and finds a remote grassy field near a strong flowing river. There she pauses to drink to look at the serene and safe place. Suddenly labour pains begin. And at the same moment she looks up to see dark clouds gathering above. She needs to find shelter quick. Lightning strikes in the woods close by and a forest fire starts and spreads quickly. The deer looks to her left and sees a hunter with a bow extending pointed at her. To the left she spots a lion approaching her-- she is in labour, ready to give birth, an easy target. What is this deer going to do?

She is surrounded by fire, the river, the lion and the hunter. Feeling the pains amounting within her she drinks from the river and spots a place close by. If only she could have her young fawn in safety. But she is not sure. She is surrounded. Just as the hunter pulls the arrow back to strike the deer, lightning strikes and causes the hunter to release the arrow which strikes the lion and not the deer. Her labour continues. With the lightning moving further into the sky. The rain comes and comes down heavily. The forest fire is doused by the rain. The lion although hurt by the arrow can still run and focuses on the hunter, until the hunter shoots again. And meanwhile by the clearing by the river, the doe gives birth to the fawn.

The deer was not sure what to do- surrounded by everything that could harm her. Yet she focused on life and the life of her fawn and found hope. From this we too will never lose hope if we focus on life. Our life in Jesus Christ.

As we begin this Advent season of waiting, watching and wondering what is to come we need to be reminded that our hope is built on Jesus Christ the One whom God sent to save us and offer to us the gift and promise of eternal life. We also need to remember that hope is a promise that God is with us and is at work in this world. God's hope is everywhere. We need to we look for it and discover what brings hope in this world where darkness abounds. This is why we are here.

Let us pray.

Loving God give us hope for this world and for our role in it as we anticipate Jesus' birth into our lives. Show us our hope in Christ. Enable us to share our hope in Christ Jesus now and so that when we are facing moments of darkness we may emerge and look up to you with new and renewed hope. Amen.