

## **Thankful for Hope**

Season of Thanks: Part 1 “Thankful for Hope”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – November 27, 2022

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent

**Readings:** Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

**Reflection:** Psalm 122

**Greeting:** Go up on a high mountain, messenger Zion! Raise your voice and shout, messenger Jerusalem! Raise your voice and don't be afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” (Isaiah 40:9)

**Prayer:** In this season of Advent, we give thanks that you are with us, Lord. We come together to prepare for our Emmanuel, our God with us, that we may ready our hearts in your presence. Let us remember the words of the prophets as we prepare our hearts for hope, peace, joy, and love and help us to be thankful for the many ways you have blessed us and kept us. Strengthen us by your steadfast faithfulness that we may boldly proclaim your message of salvation. My we worship you in a spirit of truth and may we learn to love one another as we grow in our love for you, through Jesus Christ our savior. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 122

*I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!” Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls and security within your towers.” For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, “Peace be within you.” For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. (Psalm 122 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 122 and we hear of going up to the house of the Lord. That we have hope because of God. That we can seek the good of the Lord. How have you experienced hope in Christ? How can you share hope with others? What does it mean to find peace in God's presence? How can we help others to welcome that peace? How do you prepare your heart for the coming of the Lord? How can we share in the hope of Christ this Advent?

**Prayer:** O God, help us to make this Advent be a season of thanks. May you help us to prepare our hearts for the coming of our Savior. May we find hope, peace, joy, and love as we share in your blessing. We ask that as we lay our joys and concerns before you that you will strengthen us by your spirit. We pray that you'll be with us in celebration and sorrow. May your love lift us

up in both laughter and tears. And from the darkness may we see your great light in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Isaiah chapter 2 verses 1 through 5.

*The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! (Isaiah 2:1-5 NRSV\*)*

Our next reading for today comes from Romans chapter 13 verses 11 through 14.

*Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is already the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone; the day is near. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us walk decently as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in illicit sex and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Romans 13:11-14 NRSV\*)*

Our last reading for today comes from Matthew chapter 24 verses 36 through 44.

*"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so, too, will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left. Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matthew 24:36-44 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week marks the beginning of Advent. This year we look at Advent as a season of thanks. This week we look at how we are thankful for hope. And at first glance, some people

might not see where the hope is in some of our readings for today. But our readings are mostly about being prepared in hope. When we look at our gospel reading in Matthew, Christ is talking about being ready. And if we let all that symbolism fall into place, his main point here is that we should be prepared. That we should have hope because the Son of Man is coming. That because he is coming at an unexpected hour, we can't put off what we could do today and do it tomorrow. That our hope needs to be for today, because we should treat every day as the day that our hopes are fulfilled. And I think it's important that we recognize that idea of being ready. Because I think, sometimes, we let hope be something that we have that lets us push everything off down the road. Hope for a better tomorrow. Hope that next year will be better or the year after that. Hope for someday. I'm thankful that my hope lets me prepare for now. And we hear that in Paul's letter to the Romans, that we should know what time it is. They should know what time it is. Everyone should know what time it is. It is the moment to wake up and be alert. That instead of doing things we know we shouldn't do, we should lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. That we should today do what Christ has called us to do and let our hope reside in him. And I am thankful for that hope. Because for me the hope isn't that a better day is somewhere off down the line. The hope is that today can be better. The hope is that now can be better because Christ is with us. Not just today but always. And so, my hope is that today can be better, and it can help make every day after it better. My hope is that when the Lord is with us, and we embrace the Lord, that it strengthens us to do what is right and what is good so that we can make today the day that others have hoped for. And we can be thankful that that hope has been written on our hearts. That as we prepare ourselves for the miracle that is Christmas, we let that hope be something that we live out every day.

We hear it in the words of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah speaks of a great hope for all the people. That the people will come to God. They will say to each other "let's go so that we can learn. We can learn to do good. We can walk in his paths and learn his ways so that our lives may be filled with hope." As the people learn of God's love and learn to walk with that hope in their hearts, they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not lift a sword against each other. They will no longer learn war because the Prince of Peace will be with them. That idea fills me with hope. Hope that it will come to be and hope that it could be today. But it isn't a hope that is made for disappointment. Now you see, one of the problems that we often have with hope is that we get our hopes up thinking that we know what's coming, and then when it turns out we're wrong, we feel that something has gone wrong. I think that disappointment comes from our expectations of what each day is going to look like. Because we like to plan it out and know what's coming. We like to be able to say that we know what should happen and when it should happen, and people have been doing it forever. But for me hope is the idea that every day things can get better with the hope that someday I can't imagine how things could get better.

There's a reason that I couch my hope in that way. Because if my hope is always that tomorrow will be the perfect day, and nothing will go wrong, I'm setting myself up for

disappointment if what I expect doesn't happen. But my hope is that every day shows me something new that reminds me that things are better in Christ. And that things can be better and that things will be better. And that someday I won't be able to think of a way they could be better. And I'll be surprised by hope every time. Because Christmas is being surprised by hope. How many people would say that all their hopes are fulfilled because a child was born? Or would they simply ask, "What child is this?" And then the waiting would begin. We often get it in our heads that we are simply waiting. However, we are called not to wait but to prepare. The miracle of Christmas is that hope is born as a child. A reminder that hope is not in vain. That we should be thankful that we have that hope in our hearts. But it's also a hope that we act for every day. That because we have the hope that God can make things better, we act through Christ to make things better. Because we have that hope in our hearts, we love others, knowing the love we have already experienced with the hope that all we'll be able to experience that great love. That we carry with us the hope that God will always find a way even if that way is something completely unexpected. Even if that way is something that people scoff at.

Because I want to be able to say that we should go up and learn the love God has for us so that we may share it with each other. That we will have no need to make weapons of war. That we will have no reason for conflict. That we will have no reason to fight. There will be no reason to wage war because people will know and love peace. Some might say that hope is in vain. That we will never know that day. But I don't want to go to sleep on this. I don't want to close my eyes and forget about it. I still want to go up to the house of the Lord so that I can pray that that's what happens. I still want to be able to stay awake and know that if I put on the armor of light, that I fight to make that a reality. I want to stay awake knowing that if I had known exactly what would happen and when that I would want to be there. That I was there to see that great love. And I'm thankful to have that hope as part of my life. Because hope can be hard. It's hard when you hope for a better future and see people actively fighting against that future. That people struggle against what would be good for them because it might help the "wrong people" as well. That it's hard to see that people will believe a convenient lie if it helps them to hate the people they want to hate. It's hard to see people ignoring God's truth that we should love one another. Sometimes it can be hard to have hope when the only thing people seem to be concerned about is what the streets in heaven will be paved with and not what it is Christ calls us for in this life here and now. It can be hard to have hope when it seems like every day the news is filled with bloodshed and violence. All because we are afraid to turn from bloodshed and violence.

Then I remember a child born and laid in a manger. A child born to be the hope of the world. Is he hope because he came to judge? Is he hope because he came to destroy? No, he is hope because he came to teach people how to love. Because he would teach us to have hope in love. That's the hope that carries me forward. And that is the hope that I build up in my heart preparing myself for our Savior's birth. It is a renewal in my heart, that I let hope live because love lives. That I let hope thrive because I know Christ is with me. Because I know

God's love that lets me love, and I am thankful. That I can see others in need and I can help, and for that I am thankful. That in every act of love that I can show the least and the last, that they discover hope, and for that I am thankful. That I can share a word of love and kindness and instill hope in others of our Emmanuelle, God with us. And if that hope bears love, and that love bears hope, then I pray that I may always love to inspire hope, and I can always be thankful for the hope that resides in my heart. That we may all know hope so that we may all share love. And that we all share love so that others may know hope. And that every day we hope that today will be a better day than yesterday. And every day we hope that tomorrow is the day where we can't hope for anything more. And that we will always be surprised by just how great God's love is. So let us share in hope. Let us build each other up in hope. And let us keep the hope that is Christmas in our hearts always, from this day forth and forevermore. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Season of Thanks**

Our current series is a look at the ways that God is a part of our lives, and all that God can do. We will spend five weeks exploring the ways that God acts. In them, we will see the ways God responds to us and how we can respond to God.

**November 27th** – *Thankful for Hope* – Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

**December 4th** – *Thankful for Peace* – Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

**December 13th** – *Thankful for Joy* – Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

**December 18th** – *Thankful for Love* – Isaiah 7:10-16; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25

**December 24th** – *Thankful for a Child* – Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

## **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Tricia Adkins
Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gabel
Ruth Ann Finley	Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor
Kenny Holmes	Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jeremy Klinger
Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr	Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood
Dean Carlen	Ross Matteson	Richard Durham	Carol Miller
Donna Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauzer	Steve Carlen
Connie Brown	Family of Leroy Kemper	Kyle Lehman	Kathy Hanks
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Nick & Leana Ochoa	Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Kristen & Zach Morecraft	Greg Williams
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	

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