

Hope of Advent

Christmas Feelings: Part 1 “Hope of Advent”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – December 3, 2023

1st Sunday of Advent

Readings: Isaiah 64:1-9; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

Reflection: Psalm 80

Greeting: A voice is crying out: “Clear the Lord’s way in the desert!” “Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God!” Go up on a high mountain, messenger Zion! Raise your voice and shout “Here is your God!”

Prayer: Merciful God, you sent the prophets as your messengers to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation. Give us grace to listen to their warnings and to let our lives be changed through your grace. Help us once more to celebrate the nativity, and that we may rejoice in the coming of Jesus Christ our redeemer. Prepare our hearts for the feelings of Christmas that you stir with your steadfast love and strengthen by your faithfulness that endures forever. May you build us up with feelings of hope, peace, joy, and love as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, from this day forth and forevermore. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 80

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people’s prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves. Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved. You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches; it sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River. Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted. It has been burned with fire; it has been cut down; may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance. But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself. Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

*Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.
(Psalm 80 NRSV*)*

We read the words of Psalm 80 and hear a call for restoration. A call for repentance so that we may once again feel God's saving grace. We hear of a people who have been waiting. A people who are holding on to hope. Have you ever felt like you were waiting for God? Can you think of a time when you felt God was far away? What about when God was very near? What is the hope that you carry in your heart? How can you share that hope with the people close to you? How do you prepare your heart and life for the miracle that is Christmas?

Prayer: Lord, prepare our hearts for the feelings of Christmas this Advent. That we come before you this day experiencing the hope that we find in preparing for the coming of our Savior. May your Holy Spirit guide us from darkness into the light of your love. As we come before you today, we bring to you the joys and concerns that we have spoken aloud together and shared in this place. We come to you silently with the worries and celebrations of our hearts. We pray you will help us to grow in faith through both sorrow and gladness. That through our laughter and our tears you will be with us. May we experience your mercy as you guide us in hope, peace, joy, and love in a celebration of 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 64, verses 1 through 9.

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down; the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name or attempts to take hold of you, for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people. (Isaiah 64:1-9 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 3 through 9.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of

Christ has been strengthened among you— so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the partnership of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:3-9 NRSV)*

Our last reading for today comes from Mark chapter 13, verses 24 through 37.

“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. “Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels and gather the elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight or at cockcrow or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.” (Mark 13:24-37 NRSV)*

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

Our first Sunday of Advent is about hope. That Advent is a time where we prepare ourselves for the miracle of Christmas. This year we look at our Christmas feelings, those familiar feelings that come with this time of year. Each Sunday leading up to Christmas we will be exploring hope, peace, joy, and love. This series also extends beyond Advent into the weeks after Christmas, because our feelings continue beyond our initial celebration. But this week we look at hope. That is reflected in today's readings. That there is the hope that we see in Isaiah. Hope that God will be there to make his power known to the nations. We see it in 1 Corinthians with the hope Paul has in Christ, that God will strengthen us by faith. And we see it and the Gospel reading from Mark. That we should be alert and stay awake so that we may celebrate the coming of the Son of Man. One might read through these and ask, “what do any of these have to do with Christmas?” But I think we can see it there. Because Advent is the time where we gather once again to share our hope, the hope that we have in the coming of the Prince of Peace and the King of Kings. The coming of a savior to set us free, free from slavery to sin and death, freedom found in life everlasting. And that as we await his birth it reflects our waiting for him to come in glory. And it reflects the hope that we have Savior. It is our hope in redemption. Our hope of transformation. That nothing is impossible for our God.

And that is what is reflected in today's readings. In Isaiah it's the wonder that God is so far above all else, that there is none like him. The people have hope that the Lord has not given up on them, that God does remember his people. That the people are there hoping that they

can repent and turn to God. That they see God as the potter and themselves as the clay. That they offer themselves to be molded by those loving hands, because they have hope in God's forgiveness. They have hope that there is salvation. It is the hope we have in Advent as we prepare ourselves for the birth of Christ, ready to forgive and ready to love. That we too can have hope in God's awesome deeds of wonder. Hope in a God who reaches out to touch the lives of his people. We see the hope in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. Hope in the gifts of grace that have been given. Hope in being strengthened through our relationship in Christ. Hope that we may be found to be blameless in the coming of our Lord. Hope that we are received with arms of love. And even in our Gospel reading from Mark, there is hope. That even with imagery that might throw us off or give us concern, there is always hope. That we may not know when the day will be that we see the coming of the Son of Man, so we must keep awake. Don't let yourself sleep on justice. Don't let yourself fall asleep on righteousness. Keep awake so that you may continue to show charity to others. Keep awake so that you may love your neighbor as you love yourself. Keep awake so that you can love your God with all that you have and all that you are. Stay awake because we have hope in the coming of our Lord. That we have a Savior born to set us free. Born that we may know what love truly is. Born that we may know how to care for one another.

So, we prepare. We ready our hearts for the hope that is instilled with us, the hope that we have in Christ our Lord. The hope that we have that the Holy Spirit is there to guide us and lead us. The hope that we have that our heavenly father watches over us. That he will help us to prepare our hearts, our lives, our minds, our bodies, our spirits for the celebration of a baby born and laid in a manger. And one of the ways that we prepare is by sharing that hope. Hope in a better tomorrow. Hope for a brighter future. Hope for a light in the darkness. That we carry with us a hope for peace. That we come together with a hope for joy. That through it all we have a hope in love. That we share that hope so that it may grow in the hearts of others. That we multiply our hopes when we share them together and lift them up in our prayers and our praise. Hope because of our Emmanuel, God with us. Because that is a feeling that I have every year at Advent. The hope that I have knowing that it is not "God beyond us." It is not "God somewhere around here." It is not "God somewhere out there." It is about our Emmanuel, our God with us. With us in the good times and in the bad. God with us in the struggles and in the triumph. God with us in the heartache and in the rejoicing. God with us to grant us hope. So let that hope build in your heart. Let that Christmas feeling swell inside you until it comes forth in our celebration of Christmas Day and the miracle that is our Savior. Let us carry the hope of Christ in our hearts. Let it be on our lips and in every way that we interact with our neighbor. That all may know hope. That all may know our Emmanuel. 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 – Christmas Feelings

Our Advent and Christmas series is called “Christmas Feelings.” We will be looking at the feelings we have from Advent, Christmas, New Year’s Day, and Epiphany. Each week takes on a different feeling and how we carry them with us as we look forward to another year with Christ. Let’s celebrate our Christmas feelings!

12/3: Hope of Advent	12/10: Peace of Advent	12/17: Joy of Advent
12/24: Love of Advent	12/24: Celebration of Christmas	
12/31: Old and New Year	1/7: Gift of Christmas	

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Calvin St.Michael	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams		

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