

Hope: Make Room for Waiting, Advent 1
Text: Jeremiah 33:14-17; Luke 1:5-25 (13-17)
12.2.18



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

“Where do you land on the ‘optimism meter’? What would you say is your default response?”

“How would you define ‘hope’? How does it differ from optimism or wishful thinking?”

“Is hopelessness really about the circumstance itself or is it our evaluation and response to the circumstance? Is it actually possible to be hopeful in less than favorable circumstances?”

“Are you able to honestly address your disappointment? Have you had an experience where your encounter with hopelessness has actually awakened (created) you to possibility?”

“Could it be that, at times, we have so managed and orchestrated our lives that we actually fail to make room for salvation?”

TAKE A STEP [from Sunday’s response card]

Make room for several minutes of silent listening prayer throughout the week ahead. Keep a journal and pen handy and write down any words, scriptures, or pictures that come to mind as God responds to the questions - Where has light gone out in my life? Where might hope need rekindling?

Teaching Notes...

We enter today the season identified in the Christian calendar as **“Advent”**, from the Latin word meaning **‘coming’; ‘arrival’**.

Each year we are challenged to enter The Story and re-live the longings of people whose history has included mistaken identity (forgot who they were), wandering, broken promises, unresponsiveness, woundedness--- both self-inflicted and imposed

from without--- extended bouts of captivity which severely limited their experience of freedom.

They were a people in anticipation of a better future; a world ruled by a good and benevolent King; a divine, yet mysterious “rescuer”. They called him “**Messiah**” (Gr., “Christ”, 500x). They were discouraged and depressed. Frankly, they were tired of waiting.

(3) essential components of the prime-narrative: (good story: beginning, middle, and end)

▶ The Jews believed that their God was the one, true Creator-God. Blessing was/is his self-proclaimed motivation for all of his movements toward us.

▶ The Jews believed that God “self-selected” them. This covenant-making God chose them and promised to act decisively through them in order to overcome evil and restore creative-order.

▶ The Jews believed that all of history was moving toward a purposed-end: “shalom”--- all of the evil (disorder) dealt with, the people set free, Messiah functioning as the world’s rightful King.

The theme of Advent is ‘arrival’.

It celebrates God’s stubborn commitment to justice and his willingness to move toward us in ways that are lovingly-restorative.

The mood of Advent is best described as ‘expectation’.

Psalms 130: 5-6

The anticipated response of Advent is ‘repentance’.

The meaning of the word is shaped by the Jewish experience of exile. It means to **return to God**. Literally, it means, “*to go beyond the mind that you have*”; to develop a new way of seeing and responding.

Advent can only be experienced by those who long.

Hope is indicative of the not-so-favorable conditions of our present reality.

“Waiting” and “groaning” (Romans 8). Advent holds adversity and hope in dynamic tension.

The bible IS a book filled with stories of promises and hope, but it is also a story that is marked by long periods of seeming ‘absence’; ‘silence’.

“Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently”. Romans 8:24-25

The prophets were always standing in the present and asking us to see what was yet to appear. They used phrases like, “*on that day*”, “*the day will come*”, “*in those days*”, as a means of continuing to rehearse the hope that God had not forgotten about them; that he would, one day, act to address the injustice and set things right.

Ezekiel chimed in with his vision of a people’s hearts being replaced: hard, unresponsive hearts being softened and shaped by the life and love of God. Malachi offered a compelling vision of children who responded to the parents and parents who provided their children no reason not to! Amos depicts justice (rightness) rushing through the earth like swift-water through a canyon.

In the Hebrew and Aramaic (languages in which the Bible was written), the prophets spoke about the **future** as if it ***had already happened***, so it’s often spoken of as a past event. Scholars refer to it as “*the prophetic perfect*”.

“*To your descendants I have given this land.*” Genesis 15. This promise was made to Abram when he was childless and impotent.

“*To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will rest on his shoulders...*” Isaiah 9:6 (700 years prior to Jesus’ birth)

Right now, we have God’s gift of the Holy Spirit poured into us (Romans 5) which is “a deposit (down-payment) guaranteeing” that he will give us what he promised (Ephesians 1:13). The fact that our future salvation is guaranteed means that we can speak about it as if it is as good as done.

Hope means that even in the waiting, in some profound way, we already possess it. It possesses us.

Hope is not about escaping to our own mental, “happy place”. Hope is looking directly at the unfavorable nature of our present circumstances and believing for something better. Hope is more real than despair. Trust is more real than suspicion. Love is more real than fear.

Hope is harder to hold onto than fear!

It’s easier to be afraid than it is to be hopeful. It doesn’t require as much of us. We are less disappointed.

When you are unwilling to abandon God in the midst of some pretty painful and confusing life-circumstances, that’s trust. The result of trust is hope.

We only know hope when we are able to stand with all of the props kicked out from under us--- all of our well-worn and self-imposed systems of support having proven futile--- and finally positioning us to receive something else... someone else [“You’re my only hope!”]

It's not living without bouts of discouragement or frustration, but living through them. It means that we have simply outlasted everything that opposes our joy. It is a hope that has been tested and has lived to tell about it (endured; persevered).

"Hope doesn't disappoint us..." (Romans 5). Why? Because it is a different kind of hope. It's a hope that doesn't need to predict the means by which God will make good on his promises. It gives God the freedom to be God and get creative in our lives and circumstances.

Our lives are shaped by hope. Our lives shape hope in us.

We begin to identify the places in our lives where our hopes are shaping our values and giving order to our lives.

You'll notice that sometimes in the salvation story, hope seemed to require some practical response on our part to indicate that we were ready to believe: specific instructions: *"go"*, *"build a boat"*, *"blow a trumpet"*, *"walk around a city"*, *"stand still"*.

It's hard to be "here". It's hard to live "present-ly".

Our past is often filled with regret. Our future is riddled with anxiety. The past is unalterable. The future is too unpredictable. Hope is always about life in 'real-time'.

Trust allows me to 'embrace the moment' and 'be embraced IN the moment'. It gives me permission to let go of my anxious determination to predict every outcome and control every circumstance/person toward a more pleasant outcome. It is to wait "here", with God.

An Advent prayer...

Father, I pray for those of us who "wait". Help us to keep watching for your subtle movements. Give us uncommon sense. Give us, LORD, your stubborn grace, to hope in you, our Savior, when nothing remotely resembling salvation seems to be happening around us.

Help us to trust in your unfailing word... the declaration of your goodness and your good intentions toward us. In this season of Advent, come to us, LORD. Surprise us. Sustain us.

Amen.