

Hope (First Sunday of Advent)

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Date: 29 November 2020

Preacher: Pastor Cathy Hall Stengel

[0 : 0 0] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. The Book of John, Chapter 1, Verses 1-5.

[2 : 5 6] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made. Without Him nothing was made that has been made.

In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The Lord be with you.

And also with you. God promised to all the world that a Savior would come. And oh my goodness this year, how much we need to remember that a Savior comes once again.

Jesus was sent to be a light in the darkness. A light in your darkness and in mine. In what has been a dark and sometimes fearful year.

Come. Let's remember that Jesus is the light of the world, sent to give us hope. And the light of Christ is eternal.

[4 : 3 2] Let us pray. Holy One, we thank you for the glimpses we catch of your gift of unending hope. Even in the midst of fear, of challenge, of struggle.

Even when we can't see beyond the clouds. Light again the flame of hope within us. That we, your hope, will light our path inside and out.

Amen. Friends of the ■■■■ Thank you.

Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free.

From our fears and sins release us, let us find a rest in thee.

[6 : 0 6] Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art.

Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king.

Born to reign in us forever, thou thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal spirit, rule in all our hearts alone.

[7 : 0 7] By thine own sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.

Glory to be, O private, as his services are made of light. May thy photographed the sew■■■ four united by the un verein. When my heart does a hero vehicle-egyr gifted, know what's going on in each other's lives and we invite you to fill out a friendship card on our website or you can find the link through Facebook to tell us what do we need to be in prayer for, what are we celebrating together in our lives as we go through this season of looking for hope and possibility. Blessings we know still abound. Today is a special Sunday for our mission moment.

Our mission moment this morning comes from UMCOR and UMCOR is the United Methodist Commission on Relief and it is an organization that across the world has the most integrity and honesty around the funds come in that are designated for UMCOR and they go straight to wherever the mission site is and sometimes it's many times it's in somewhere in the United States and other times it's in places that are part of the United States like Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands and places like that.

The Mariana Islands that are near Hawaii and Guam and over there we have a far reach and the hope is that we will tend to people in a time of natural disaster, fire, flood, just all kinds of things and so if you go to our website you'll see a link for donating to UMCOR.

So I hope that maybe not today, you don't have to do it today, you can do it at any time. United Methodist Commission on Relief and I have been honored myself to be a part of that.

[9 : 37] So I invite you to come together in this time of reflection for our offering as we prepare to receive in spirit the gifts that we give back to our Lord.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[12 : 07] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

We praise you and we give back to you a reflection of our gratitude and our love and our commitment. We pray that you will bless these gifts, that they may go out and spread your hope, that this world will change from darkness to light, that this ministry of life and love that you give to us will be spread abroad.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Amen. Please be seated. Good morning, church.

[14 : 48] Good morning. As we know, we are coming through the season of Thanksgiving and into a new season, one of preparation, one of anticipation, one of excitement. And we do that at this time of year with such joy in our hearts.

Not only joy, but today we're also focusing on hope. So as we come to a time of being hopeful, and as you heard Pastor Kathy say in the open, boy, this year, we need to be in touch with our hope.

Amen. So let's open our hearts and go to God together as God's people as we pray to our Lord. Lord, in this time we come full of thanksgiving.

Full of thanksgiving because we know that you are on the move. We move from thanking you for the things that you have done, the things that you have freely given, to the things that you are doing and about to do.

As we enter into this season of preparation, we know that we continue to struggle with such things in front of us. A time when the world can feel so overwhelming.

There are those among us who are still caring for those who are struggling. There are those among us who know those in hospitals and need their hearts lifted.

But as we rail and flail in the darkness, we also know that the light comes. And the light gives hope.

[17:16] And so we continue forward in hope. Hope that is built on who our God is and the things our God has done.

Hope built on a way out of no way out. Hope built on a way out of no way out of no way
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out of no way.

[18:54] Hello, church family. This weekend we have two readings. The first is from Isaiah 40, verses 1 to 11, and the second is from John 1, verses 1 to 5.

All flesh is grass, and its loyalty is like the flowers of the field. The grass dries up, and the flower withers when the Lord's breath blows on it.

[20 : 39] Go up on a high mountain, messenger Zion. Raise your voice and shout, messenger Jerusalem. Raise it.

And from John 1, 1-5, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made.

[21 : 45] In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

This is the Word of our Lord. Thanks be to God. Hope.

What does it mean to be hopeful, to feel hope, to know hope, to have a sense that in the dark of the night, the expectation that day will come, and the sun will rise, even if it's behind the clouds, and yet another day will begin again.

So then the question becomes, what can steal our hope? What takes our hope from us at times? An illness that will not end, that gives us a sense of pain or discomfort that simply doesn't go away.

We can't see the healing at the end of the road. A feeling of depression that isn't related to our circumstances. And we wonder, when will the world grow lighter and more hopeful?

[23 : 10] Is it the hope for you that when you put your key in the car, that it'll start? For some people, that's a very real hope, because sometimes it doesn't.

So many times and places, we don't even realize how hopeful we are. Even the most pessimistic people, if you talk it through, you will find that even they have hope.

2020 has called upon us to find hope in ways that sometimes we haven't found before. 2020 dawned for me with the hope of a grandchild to be born in June.

And then, once COVID came, the hope that when I became the pastor here, that we wouldn't be wearing masks, that we would all be together, gathered, I thought that for July.

And here we are, beginning Advent. So how is it that we hold hope? Sometimes, we resign ourselves.

[24 : 19] It's just going to be this way. It's just going to be this way. The people of Israel had resigned themselves to suffering, to captivity, to being held in the chains of being the possession instead of being a people free and able to live.

I wonder sometimes if we don't sort of feel like we're in exile in this time of our lives. Exile from each other. Exile from the giant Thanksgiving tables that we thought we maybe could have.

Exiled from jobs where places are closed. But you know, it's, life goes on. And the everyday struggles that are dramatic for some and other people don't even know about.

They call upon us to find our hope in places that we're not sure we know where. People who are dealing with illnesses that might cost them their life.

People who are dealing with the end of marriages and the end of jobs and the end of life as they have known it. That has nothing to do with COVID. And so, we are called to come back and come back and come back to the candle of hope, to the hope in Christ who is our Savior.

[25 : 54] You know, one of the hymns that's in our hymnal that kept coming back to my mind as I thought about hope is my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

There are many hymns and songs about hope. In the reading from Isaiah, what you hear is there's a transition in Isaiah from the first part which is pretty challenging and somewhat grim and then we move into a place where God begins to use Isaiah to preach about hope and comfort.

Comfort my people. And you hear in the passage this morning God's arm, God will care for, God will look after the baby lambs, meaning that God will look after the weakest, the lostest, sometimes the most hopeless among us.

we go to John and people might say, well, wait, all the other gospels start with the Christmas story.

What's up with John? Why does John not talk about Mary and Joseph and Jesus? John had a bigger calling. Not bigger than Jesus coming because it is about Jesus coming.

[27 : 21] but if you look at the words in John in the beginning, where else do we find those words in a big way in the Bible?

Genesis. If you go from John all the way back to Genesis to the beginning, in the beginning, God created. And in the beginning, all was dark.

Everything in the world was dark. God said, let there be light. God created light and darkness. So then there were day and night.

Part of what John is trying to tell us is, you know, Jesus didn't show up when the gospels were written. Jesus didn't first show up with Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem because the Trinity God, the Creator, Father, God, Jesus Christ, our Savior, and the Holy Spirit are all one.

And Jesus was in the beginning and that's what John is telling us. In the beginning, God created. And John says, in the beginning. We hear the words in Genesis that talk about God speaking God speaking light.

[28 : 48] God speaking dark. God speaking water and sky. And John is saying, in the beginning was the Word.

In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was God and the Word was with God. And in the beginning, God created the light of the world and no darkness can overcome it.

No darkness can overcome it. No darkness can overcome it. Maybe sometimes you have felt in your life like the darkness could overcome the light.

Like the sun isn't going to come up again. But we live in this world where day does come. Maybe sometimes day doesn't come on the time we thought because we're in our own darkness.

People have been living in darkness throughout all of creation. Times of darkness like the people of Israel. In the time that the Gospels were written, it was a time of conflict and persecution.

[30 : 04] It was not a time of yay, praise God, let's change the world because people of faith in Jesus Christ were afraid. And yet they persevered.

And then let's look at some of our own history that maybe we're more aware of. One of the experiences that I recently read about and watched the movie on Amazon Prime is called Defiant Requiem.

And if you have any background in classical music, there's a piece of music called Verdi's Requiem. And it's a long, dramatic piece that would basically that one piece would be a whole concert.

It was written as a funeral mass in 1874. but in 1941, in the concentration camp Terezin in Czechoslovakia, part of the prisoner population was a conductor, a composer, a director.

And while every day, day after day, these Jewish prisoners became weaker and more persecuted, there was this underground life that was about learning Verdi's Requiem.

[31 : 39] I want to share with you some quotes through of Verdi's Requiem. it begins, Lord have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us, Lord have mercy upon us.

It boldly declares that death will be amazed in coming before the almighty judge who will determine that there is no death anymore for those who believe.

It begs for forgiveness and it begs not to be forgotten by Jesus as a savior. It rises in faith, Hosanna in the highest, the choir of hundreds would sing, blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest.

and then it ends, deliver me, deliver me, deliver me from this captivity, from this life, deliver me.

While this composer, director, who was one of the prisoners, he gathered people in the dark of the night, in the quiet of the night, and they learned Verdi's Requiem.

[33 : 07] The prisoners did. They learned it, and they learned it. They had no sheet music, they had no instruments, and yet there were 150 people who were prisoners who learned this great math.

And some of the people who participated in that, they are quoted as a part of this documentary, and they say things like, they might be physically holding me prisoner, but they cannot have my spirit.

They might be treating me unkindly, but they cannot have my spirit. They cannot have who I am. Because in this music, in this joy, in this possibility of a God who will deliver us from this place, I will have hope.

and no one can ever take it away from me. And so the culmination of this documentary shows where a composer from, director from the United States, went to Czechoslovakia to the Terezin concentration camp and brought in an orchestra of a hundred, a choir of a hundred or more.

and they did Bertie's Requiem. And one asked, why? Why did you want to do this?

[34 : 38] And the director said, because I want the message to go to the people who were prisoners in here. If they have ears to hear, we heard you.

We know where you held your hope. We know that being behind these walls did not define you.

The concert in 1944 that they did was for Hitler's army and it was for a delegation from the Red Cross who was coming, the International Red Cross, who were coming to see were the prisoners being treated fairly.

No, they weren't. And so as the people rose to their feet and sang in the concert part of what they said about themselves is, this is what we have to say to you, Hitler's army.

We will rise. We will stand before our maker with a sense of who God is in our hearts and our lives. You cannot keep us.

[35 : 45] We're not there. We're not in that kind of prison and yet, story after story of places in the dark of the night where people have found hope.

There was a family I worked with at the hospital in Colorado and the husband and dad was in the intensive care unit, the COVID unit where I was a chaplain.

And my role was to talk to the family and then hold the iPad so that they could talk to Javier. And Maria, Javier's wife, her face would be on the iPad and she would say, Javi, Javi, Javi, to try to let him know I'm here.

You are not by yourself. Hear this voice. And then she would move into prayer and celebration and honor for the Savior she knows as Jesus Christ.

And soon their church was on the iPad and there was a prayer meeting. I'm going to be really honest with you, I didn't think Javier was going to make it.

[37 : 04] I did not think that he was going to survive COVID. And some people didn't. It isn't as though faith made this story magical.

It's just that he did survive. And she kept calling him in his confusion and his disorientation. She kept calling him by name and saying, I'm here.

God is here. Jesus is here. And even if you pass from this life, you will go to be with our Savior. Advent.

this Sunday of hope is meant to be that for us. The light shines in the darkness and it shall not be overcome.

Will we have moments? Yes, we will. Are we already and have we had moments? Disappointment, a sense of abandonment, a sense of isolation, a sense of people not understanding what it means to us to not be able to be with friends and not be able to socialize in the way that we want.

[38 : 22] Of course, there will be moments. One of the songs that was also written, this one was written, during the Holocaust experience, I used it in my newsletter article.

It reads, I believe in the sun. I believe in the sun. But I believe in the sun even when it's not shining. I believe in love.

I believe in love. I believe in love even when I cannot feel it. And I believe in God. I believe in God even when it seems God is silent.

I believe in God. Let the light of hope shine on us when we feel lost and from within us when we are with others.

We will persevere. We will carry on with all things working together. Our cars will start. The coffee maker will make the coffee.

[39 : 35] The sun will come up and we will be called upon to live another day. The question is how? May it be with the light of Christ shining within us, flickering and flaming, and may it shine around us with the help of this gathered community of faith, online, in person, it doesn't matter where.

Let's pray. Lord, we pray that you will be the light of our lives. We pray that you will light the way in the darkness, that you will help us, even as we drive the streets and look at Christmas lights, to look at the lights shining from within, that they might be reminders that you are here, and that your light cannot, will not, be extinguished, no matter the darkness.

Pray, and we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

We are thankful for the hope we have through Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior, and we celebrate that with the sacrament of communion. The Lord be with you.

[41 : 19] And also we do. Lift up your hearts. We lift our heart the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. Amen. Amen. It is right and a good and joyful thing always and everywhere to raise our voices with you, tuning ourselves to you, creator of heaven and earth.

You filled the night of creation with music and light, setting in motion the rhythms of sunrise and sunset, of sound and silence.

You formed within us your love song and breathed into us the breath of life. Sometimes our voices are choked and we cannot find your melody, but you keep the bass line humming, waiting for us to rejoin the chorus.

You show up in the worst of times, offering us the way to freedom in you. Your voice breaks through in prophets whose songs wake us up to the kingdom you desire.

And so with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn. Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

[42 : 45] Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Holy are you and blessed is your son, Jesus Christ.

Breaking forth into light from the blessed darkness of a womb, he brought light that illumined a path so we could see our way to beloved community.

Your spirit anointed him to raise his voice, to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed and to announce that the time had come when you would save your people.

He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners and invited us to do the same. Born into a world of suffering, he suffered.

Born into a world of senseless death, he died. Born into a world that needed hope, he rose, delivering us and proclaiming light and life, triumph for the living and the dead.

[44 : 01] When the Lord Jesus ascended, he promised to be with us always in the power of your word and Holy Spirit, Holy Savior, lighting our way.

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread. He gave thanks to you, broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples and said, Take and eat. This is my body, which is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. And when the supper was over, he took the cup. He gave thanks to you. He gave it to his disciples and said, Drink from this, all of you.

This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

And so in remembrance of your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ's offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

[45 : 04] Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and cup.

Make them be for us, your love and light, so that our hearts may be opened in service to you and to the world. By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.

Mix our voices in harmony with each other until we sit at the same table and sing in the same choir in your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty God, now and forever. Amen. And now let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

[46 : 18] And deliver us from the creation, but deliver us from the world. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.

Amen. And now we will be receiving the sacrament together, so please carefully take off your masks and we will receive the bread first.

The body of our Lord, given for you. The blood of our Lord, poured out for you.

Glory to God. Amen. Please place your mask back on. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. God.

[47 : 34] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Praise His name. Amen.

The Son of God, here born to bleed. A crown of thorns would pierce His brow. And we beheld this offering Exalted now the King of kings Praise God for the power of the angel crown Emmanuel Emmanuel God incarnate here to dwell Emmanuel Emmanuel Praise His name Emmanuel Praise His name

Emmanuel Emmanuel Jesus was sent to be the light of the world and they followed a star so that they could go and find a Savior child.

[51 : 09] The star still shines. The light of the world still lives. Go in hope. Light your candles and be reminded that the love of God the Father, the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and the incredible encouragement and challenge of the Holy Spirit goes with you today and forever.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.