

Sermon: Hope is on the Way

Scripture: Isaiah 2:1-5, Matthew 24:36-44

First Sunday of Advent

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Our First Scripture comes from Isaiah 2:1-5. Isaiah prophecies about the multitude of people from various nations coming before the Lord in the latter days. Therefore, Isaiah encourages the Israelites to live out their faith to be a visible example to the others. Let us hear the word of the Lord together through prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 2:1-5

¹The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

²In 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.

³ 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 God may teach us the God's ways
and that we may walk in God's paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴The Lord 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.

⁵O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD!

Amen.

Our Second Scripture reading is Gospel of Matthew 24:36-44. It can be found on page 27 of the New Testament in the pew Bibles. First Advent Sunday's texts are apocalyptic texts and this chapter is

Matthew's account of the signs of the end of the age. Yet, gospel does not only speak of the impending doom but rather it focuses on the coming of the Son of Man. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

Matthew 24:36-44

³⁶ "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ 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, ³⁹ and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so, too, will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴² Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ 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. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

This is the Word of the Lord; **Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray. Holy and Loving God, as we enter a new church calendar year while the world is still resting and reflecting of this year's bounties, may we be the first ones to pivot and take the first steps towards to be filled with hope, looking forward to the promises and treasures that are ahead of us. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

I hope that all of you had a wonderful Thanksgiving, and it is with much joy to welcome you to this service as we celebrate the dawn of a new Christian year. As this Sunday anchors the Thanksgiving weekend, it seems fitting to take a quick moment to reflect on the year and all the things we are thankful and have been blessed by this year. Therefore, let us take pause and give God thanks for the blessings in our lives.

Friend, if we are honest with ourselves, and if you really think about it, Thanksgiving is very interesting holiday. It is holiday tradition that celebrates the bounty from the labors which logically should mean that we should rest from their labors and enjoy what we have gathered. Yet, it is one of those holidays that we work our tails off and make sure that we have enough food to have go around the table! How many of us are more tired this morning than when this weekend started? I know that I have eaten little more than I should and I will attempt to digest and lose the calories of what I have eaten for next few days, but that is what happens when you are surrounded by the people whom you love – family and friends. As I thank God for so many blessings in my life, I realized there is something that we all do unintentionally that gets us in the mood of spirit of Advent. Many of us do this out of practicality. Some, just like Christmas. Others might be like me, where some of the family practices has become a family tradition. Somewhere in the midst of the Thanksgiving, all of us who are eating and

enjoying the company of our beloved ones, switch and start thinking about what is to come: Christmas. Each year, my brothers and I start putting up Christmas lights while gathered in my mother's house. This year, as we were putting up those lights, we even joked about how putting up the Christmas lights at mom's house has become an unspoken rite of passage for her sons to be married with our significant other as my youngest brother introduced his girlfriend to the family for the first time. Sure, I can keep talking about the traditions, but how we pivot, what we talk about, and expect for Christmas changes somewhere in Thanksgiving and we start looking forward.

Advent is a season of two things: time of expectant waiting and preparation for both the celebration of birth of Christ at Christmas and hoping in the return of Christ the King's second coming. We do a fabulous job of celebrating the nativity of Christ. We place its decorations and some of us even debate when it is the rightful time to listen to Christmas carols and music. Yet, do we really think about the latter? Having hope in the fulfillment of God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven? Why is it ever-so-important that Jesus does return? And how can we be ready for something that comes "about the day and hour that no one knows" except our heavenly Father?

In a worldly sense, hope is an anticipation and desire of something to happen. Yet the hope through a Christian lens is much deeper and more concrete than the worldly understanding. It is not an anticipation but having a confidence, a full trust, that God will fulfill God's promises, that God will uphold God's covenant with us regardless of our own failures and brokenness. There is no way to prepare for what is to come. I couldn't predict the date and hour that I was able to hold my daughter for the first time. I did not see myself becoming a pastor. I could not predict the times of losses in my life, especially when my maternal grandmother passed right before me when I was a child. All I can confess is that I might not have known the timing of all these things in my life, yet God has been faithful. Even the Bible chimes in and tells us through Matthew in chapter 6 that "do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own," and that we must seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness. So then why is the Bible telling us to be ready and be prepared for something we do not know? I do not have a concrete answer, but Isaiah passage gives us a hint at why we must have a Biblical hope in Jesus. It is because the inevitable is coming, that one day we will face our Maker, the righteous Judge. In the sight of the righteous, we are defenseless, hopeless, and helpless. Yet the Bible tells us from cover to cover that we serve an unfair God, who takes our smallest grains of faith and deems it as righteousness to shield us, cover us, and guard us from the righteous judgement.

The challenge of Advent is to live in hope, the Biblical hope, of fully trusting and having the confidence that the promises of God will reign in our very own lives, not as the stories of 2,000 years ago, but God gives us a way to live in hope by holding on to the promises of God, to give us a goal to work towards to, and to live out what we believe in. Hebrews 6:19 & 20 reminds us that we have this hope, trusting in God's promises, which as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure, and that Jesus has entered on our behalf to be our high priest. All of us already experienced every single one of that. In our journey of life, we have experienced many unknowns and unpredictable events in our lives, yet we have been touched by the steadfastness of God. In hope, we cling on to the cross to endure through the challenges in the journey of life.

During the most difficult times of our lives, God carried us. In our darkest times, God shone God's marvelous light to be the lamp for our feet and a light onto our path. Whenever a trial and tribulations were shaking us to the core, more often than not, we realize in hindsight that it is God who ran towards our hearts, into our souls to ground us and secured our path forward.

Therefore, hope leads us to become more like Christ, imitating and emulating his love, and motivating us to be more than just for ourselves. That we are called as ambassadors and child of God to see the fingerprints of God on each other's faces, that we may lift one another in hope, in faith and in love.

We are like bamboo branches in that we have learned to be flexible and not break in the storm through hope, and it is also that same hope that calls us and binds us together in one Spirit as a body of Christ to be able to take on greater weight and challenges, like a bundle of bamboo branches, supporting one another through the hurricanes in our lives, as this congregation and all of us have experienced COVID and personal losses we faced in our past.

Friends, all this would mean nothing, but hope challenges us to live out what we believe. If we truly believe in the promises of God, that we are a new creation, people who have been given second chances, we ought to invite others who are experiencing many difficulties, that they may share in grace and joy, the blessings that we experience every day. We cannot be celebrating just for ourselves, but to invite those who are experiencing uncertainties, the unknowns, the unexpected. That is ALL of us. That is ALL of humanity. That is ALL of God's creation. The invitation to celebrate the nativity of Christ and the second coming must be extended to all whom we meet through in our lives, to share not only our blessings, but also our passion, our love, and through our generosity.

Jesus Christ, is the way, the truth, and the life. Our hope is on the way, and that is ever so clear that Christ will reign once again on earth as it is in heaven. Are we being dared and challenged enough to deliver the same hope to others who are in need today? Let us proclaim to the world that Westminster is indeed in the world for ministry, and that their hope, for the lost, Jesus Christ is on the way too. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.