

ADVENT 1 2018
WHERE IS THE HOPE?
[written in oral form]

Jeremiah 33:14-16; Luke 21:25-36
Advent 1, Year C

December 2, 2018
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If you haven't figured it out from the songs and decor, today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is a time of preparation with a strong feel of desirable expectation. We know the routine, we've been here before, and we have a good idea how things are going to turn out, but even so, it is beneficial to go through the motions / to do the preparation.

Moreover, who knows.....? We may be surprised this time. We may be divinely touched in a new and different way. ??

We can only hope. Hope begins Advent. It is today's focus.
We watch and wait in hope.
Yet, ...it seems harder, these days to be hopeful.
Is anything really going to change, or is all this expectation just wishful thinking?

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One afternoon, a man approached a children's softball game. He asked a boy on the bench what the score was. The boy responded, "Eighteen to nothing—we're behind." "Oh my goodness," said the spectator, "I'll bet you're discouraged." "Why should I be discouraged?" replied the young boy. "We haven't even gotten up to bat yet."

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Did the little boy have hope?.....or... just naive wishful thinking?
OR....was he Way out of touch with reality? ????

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There is more to hope, than just expecting or **wanting** something to happen. Quite often we confuse a **wish** / a dream with hope. And, sometimes we are just way out of touch with reality.

There are many things we would like to see or need to have happen-- some are hopes and some are not.

A few examples:

Maybe our desire is to get into shape and lose weight over the holidays?

Maybe it is to improve our lot in life, to have more money and stuff?

Maybe the desire is a greater sense of safety and stability?

Perhaps it is the desire to see a just society, where the rich declare, "enough is enough; I don't need any more money" and the powerful use their influence to help the weak and not for their own benefit.

Maybe we want to see the rich nations of the world work to feed the hungry, instead of sponsoring more wars by selling armaments.

Or, our hope could be for affluent nations to open their borders and wallets to help the desperate and poor. ???

Maybe all nations will actively commit to stop causing climate change.  
.... or perhaps, the desire / the need is more personal, such as healing or comfort?

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Those examples, are they a wish.... a hope.... or a far flung dream?
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In Jeremiah's time, the Babylonians have just levelled Jerusalem, and those in Judah must have thought that God had abandoned them.  
Yet, in our text, Jeremiah speaks of God's continuing promise to the people. The passage asserts that God will act; God will execute justice and righteousness.  
Jeremiah presents an optimistic message for people enduring otherwise gloomy tidings.  
It is the picture of the light at the end of the tunnel, suggesting to all to just hang in there a little longer.

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We see that light as Jesus, yet that sure took a long time in coming. Jeremiah's audience was long gone by then.

The Luke passage warns of all sort of travesties and natural calamities, and encourages the listeners to be brave and rise up when things get really ugly, ... because that is when redemption will happen.
Some read into this.... the return of Jesus – the return of a stronger, leaner and more buff Jesus.... who will finally bring justice and righteousness.

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All of us here, today, take these prophecies / predictions in stride. We've heard them before, and so we..... smile .... and think....ah.... it must be Christmas time because we are talking about salvation promises again, with flavours of hope, joy peace and love..... How nice.....

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Those who have given up on the church, those who no longer engage with the message... .. are more inclined to shake their heads and ignore all this fluff,..... and if forced to confront the messages they would strategically counter:
The people of Jeremiah's time never lived to see the rescue.
The Messiah Never Came for them.
The people were fed a wish.

Those skeptics would add that if "That Branch" was Jesus, then... what difference did he really make?
For the average person who is looking for help and rescue, what did Jesus do except give promises for future rescue,.... when he comes back.
AND..... 2,000 years later,....some people are still foolishly waiting.

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*I've heard those sort of dismissive remarks from people who mock the church's vision of peace and justice as idealism and naive wishful thinking.*

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To be sure, we could declare that the Messianic and Gospel messages are really spiritual in nature, and not pertaining to the real world.

But, that excuse makes us look petty and insults the life of Jesus.

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So, where is the hope?

How do we embrace this message with Real Hope? Real hope is based on viable truth and the plausibility that the desired outcome will truly happen. ???

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We believe that the messiah did come in the form of Jesus, yet the world is still full of hate, injustices, wars and evil. People are still hurting and suffering.

People are still praying to be rescued. Some Christians long for the Bold Second coming of Jesus.... thinking, the next storm, the next war, the next calamity...will introduce Jesus to the world again.

How do we reconcile this message?

How do we proclaim that war never brings peace, and that non-violence is the way that has the best chance of resolving conflicts? How do we do that without being dismissed as naive?

How do we give words of encouragement to those suffering and afraid?

How do we share that Jesus' way is the way to redemption and reconciliation....when so much of life seems dark and bleak?

OR....Are we just idealistic with wishful thoughts? ???

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Before we throw up our arms in frustration and dismay, thinking that this sure doesn't sound like a nice Advent sermon, ... let us consider the whole message, ... and not just a limited view.

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We are not so helpless. Moreover, throughout the Bible – New and Old Testament – we are admonished to participate in life / in the “Relationship” with God. It is not all God.

We are not puppets and we are not whimpering victims.

God has empowered, equipped, enabled and inspired us, and more.... God has offered God's Spirit to be IN and through us... if.... we so choose to engage in life beyond our selfish reach.

And, yes..... there still exists evil in the world.

Humanity still hasn't learned of the futility of war.

The powerful still exploit the weak and control the rules, and greed continues to prey on too many people.

In spite of the dire warnings we continue to deplete and overheat our environment.

And,keeping all that bleakness in mind should give us hope!

Because, after all these centuries, justice and righteousness has NOT been overwhelmed.
The voice crying peace, grace, justice and love.... is still being heard.
We have not destroyed ourselves.

The ways of greed, violence-- **evil** appear irresistible, yet a few committed and empowered people can make a huge difference!

If evil is so powerful it would have won Long Ago.

Contemplating THAT truth. Seeing that vision... should give us all a great deal of hope.

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Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful , committed people can change the world.

Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

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Consider our new \$10 bill. It has a picture of The Museum of Human Rights --that's impressive.... AND Viola Desmond.

75 years ago, Viola was a pioneer of cosmetics for black women. She was black, and after training, she sold her own line of hair and skin care. She was an entrepreneur. In 1946, she decided to see a movie in the Rosewood theatre in New Glasgow N.S. The movie theatre was segregated. Light skinned people got the good seats on the main floor, and people with a dark complexion were confined to the balcony.

Viola's vision wasn't so good, so she tried to buy a ticket on the main floor. She was refused, so she bought one for the balcony at 1 cent less. However, she walked to a main floor seat and sat down. She refused to leave and the police came and dragged her out.

The court convicted and fined her \$26 for not paying the extra 1 cent.

People were upset, both blacks and whites, and there were protests.

Viola became the inspiration for many, and caused bigotry and racism to quiver. **One Person.**

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Yes, change for the better does happen, even from just one person.

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In 2010, N.S. gave her a pardon, and the **black** lieutenant governour signed it. Plus, the \$10 bill is vertical. It is Standing up!

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Martin Luther King Jr. shared his dream and empowered people with hope. ....He was One of a growing group of people speaking out.

Mother Teresa committed her life to being Christlike .... in Calcutta. She ministered to some of the most desperate and needy people of the world. She organized a group of nuns calling them, the "Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta", and countless thousands found healing and hope,.... and many more were inspired.

Mother Teresa said, “We know only too well that what we are doing is nothing more than a drop in the ocean. But, if the drop was not there, the ocean would be missing something. She was just one faithful person.

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In the early 1980s, Ron Sider published a book called, Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger. The book was about how our affluence and life style choices are making and keeping others poor. Such as, one third of all the tuna caught goes into making cat food,... while people go hungry.

A few progressives applauded his book, yet the interesting thing is that Ron Sider and his message of social justice is catching on in conservative evangelical churches. The acceptance of Fair Trade products is but one example of the response.

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Yes, there is a lot of ugly out there..... Greed, violence and injustices--**Evil** still exists and the demonic darkness can be very unnerving and even frightening, YET.....the amazing thing is that one small light can make a huge difference.

I fully realized the power of one light when I took a tour of Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. At one point in the tour, deep down in a huge cave, the guide went over to a wall, and turned off all the lights. Total darkness is powerful.

It is complete; however, the tour guide lit one match, and suddenly everyone could see.... a little. The darkness was overwhelmed by one small light.

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That same principle works in life. A small light for justice and peace is more powerful than all the forces of darkness.

I’m not suggesting that victory and domination is at hand when a light appears, far from it. But, bringing light into the situation changes things..... in a big way, and for the good,..... eventually.

As Samuel Rayan of India said, “A candle-light is a protest at midnight. It is a non-conformist. It says to the darkness, ‘I beg to differ.’”

For my own inspiration and as a reminder, I have placed a light in my office window.

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One more example about how a few people can alter the course of world history, in ways that are surprising and powerful.

In the 1950s, the interfaith pacifist organization called, Fellowship of Reconciliation, launched an ambitious campaign to challenge the American people and government to look beyond politics and to feed the hungry. They organized a “Feed Thine Enemy” program, in which tiny bags of rice were sent to President Dwight Eisenhower at the White House, with a message concerning the famine in Communist China. The message quoted Jesus and it said: “If thine enemy is hungry, feed him.”

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The program flopped. No one in the White House acknowledged the existence of the campaign, and it didn't change the public silence on Chinese suffering. Hostility grew between the nations, and there was no alteration of any Chinese policy.....Except one....

A crisis arose over the possession of the islands of Quemoy and Matsu. China claimed the islands as did the US backed Taiwanese government. Taiwan and China were not friends, and the dispute was leading to war. Twice the generals advising Eisenhower recommended pre-emptive nuclear strikes against China, and each time Eisenhower turned to his aides and asked how many little bags of rice had come in?

Thousands, he was told.

The gesture of sending the bags of rice to the White House made an impact on the President. He was motivated to see the problem in terms of people instead of just borders on a map.

Indifference to the opinion of so many Americans, Eisenhower cited the little bags of rice as the reason he ruled out nuclear weapons in this situation.

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The 18<sup>th</sup> century statesman, Edmund Burke rightly said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good [people] to do nothing."  
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We seem to be living in precarious times.
More and more people are empowering populous tyrants.
We are in a world where the rich get richer.... forcing the poor into deeper poverty and desperation.
Moreover, as our planet heats up, we seem content in burning down our own houses in order to roast marshmallows.

Where is the Hope? [hand gesture to congregation]

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Is it up to us to save the world?  
Does the future depend on us?  
Far from it, and we dare not flatter ourselves with such contemplation.

The redemption of humanity's compassion and social justice is a God thing.  
Giving hope when the future seems bleak and scattering the darkness with light....is a God thing.

We are as candles, and God's Spirit is the flame.  
There is hope because evil / darkness has not prevailed, and never will. The hope is in knowing one candle/ one person is powerful.

God is present all around, and God is coming to you and me.... to inspire / to illuminate us / to empower us..... so we can break through the darkness..... and help guide others, too.

Hold onto the hope. Rise up and let that hope be seen.

We are not alone,..... and it really isn't that dark out there, after all.