

11-26-22 Sermon #45 Hope

Sing steadfast love of the Lord

I'd like to start something new at First Church. In recent conversations with some friends and some other Pastors, we were talking about Christmas and about the meaning of Christmas.

December 25th is the official date of Christmas, and as a way to prepare us mentally, a lot of churches use Advent as a way to bring special honor to God. Advent is usually four Sundays leading up to Christmas day.

One friend stated that these four weeks are what he sees as Christmas. Not the actual day.

The word "Advent" means the coming of Christ, or the second coming, so the period leading up to Christmas is known as Advent. It is the first season of the Christian church year. On each of the four Sundays preceding Christmas, an Advent candle is lit. The four candles of Advent represent hope, love, joy, and peace – the virtues Jesus brought us.

What do the four candles of Advent symbolize together?

During Advent, we prepare ourselves spiritually for the anniversary of Christ's birth. But what do the Advent candles represent together? The four Advent candles are arranged on a circular Advent wreath, with no beginning or end, reminding us of the eternity of God's love and the everlasting love we find in Jesus. Together the Advent candles are a reminder of God's promise to us of salvation through Christ. The wreath is placed in a prominent position in the home - at the front door or on a windowsill so that all can see it, and it can be a constant reminder of Advent.

Taking the time to focus on the gospel and looking at how much Christ has been a part of God's plan, makes the birth of Christ even more real. As I just stated, this Sunday represents "HOPE".

Each week somebody is going to come up and light a candle and share some thoughts with us.

(Tom & Melissa)

(First Advent Candle – Hope) The first candle symbolizes a shining light in anticipation of the coming of Christ. It is usually a purple candle and can be called the **Prophecy Candle**. It represents God's forgiveness of man's sins. Purple is traditionally the most important of the Advent candle colors. It is the color of liturgical garments used for vestments and is associated with prayer, contemplation, repentance, and hope. This week, Tom & Melissa are going to share some thoughts with us and start our time of preparation for Christmas day. They will be lighting the first candle, and this is the candle that represents hope. Hope is something that we all have used in our lives.

(Tom & Melissa light the candle)

People who have children or have raised children, tried to teach them about Jesus' birth and about how important it is not to get caught up in the gifts. Every family is different.

As a child, Christmas was my mom & dad's favorite holiday. My dad made his own nativity scene. He even went out and bought a new table saw just so he could build the barn and the manger. He went to the ceramics store and bought the figures and hand painted them. I remember talking with him while he was making the nativity, and the more my mom & dad prepared for Christmas the more anticipation I got.

I remember one year my mom had a calendar that had squares that needed to be opened every day and had a piece of candy behind the window. She would gather my sister, brother, and me before she would open the next window, and as Christmas drew nearer then she would start baking cookies and brownies, and she would decorate the house with all the different decorations.

Here at First Church, we've been becoming a praying church, and when I hear how many of you are using prayer more, it brings tremendous hope to me.

We've said goodbye to a few loved ones. Saying goodbye to them and knowing they are present with God is a great example of what hope looks like. Jesus is the reason. Jesus asks us to share our hopes with Him. Loving Christ and being able to pray is how we know what true hope is. Seeing answers to our prayers requires that we lean on God. We have to wait for God to do what only God can do.

This isn't a new concept. In the Old Testament, there is a number of examples of how people lost hope. Living a hopeless life is terrible, and many of us have gone through those times. In the O.T., God continually tried to instill hope through the prophets, and He still tries to do this for us today. Prophets foretold the future to a hopeless people.

Just like them, we hold onto the future also. When we read scriptures that talk about the end times, we always find hope in God's word. We depend on God to sustain us, and we lean on the words of the bible to help us understand how God is going to get us through all the evil around us. God is faithful, and Christians hold onto His promises.

I was thinking about the story of Noah. It must have taken tremendous faith to be able to build the ark. How he pleaded with God is a great example of HOPE. The people of that time must have thought he was nuts, but he just kept building and building. God brought hope to people through the prophets.

Just one example comes from Isaiah 11:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

²The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—

God is bringing hope to them by the foretelling of Christ. God reveals Christ more in verse 10:

¹⁰In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

Jesus' birth made these hopes come true. His birth was just the beginning. We've been able to witness the life of Christ, and now we have to hold onto the hope of His second coming and of Heaven.

I love how Matthew 24 says,

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings.² **“Do you see all these things?”** he asked. **“Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down.”**³ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. **“Tell us,”** they said, **“when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”**

They needed to have something to “HOPE for”. Jesus does this by saying verse 30 and 31:

³⁰ “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Can you picture this? WOW!

This kind of hope is only available because of the story of Jesus’ birth. In the bulletin, I listed three verses for us to ponder this week (listed further below). Take the time to meditate on them.

If you’re still struggling with believing and with having hope, I would invite you to come forward or find someone that you can talk with.

Let’s pray.

Mark 1:1-3: The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way” ³ “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

Ephesians 1:18: I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,

Hebrews 10:23: Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.