

THE LESSON: Jeremiah 33:14-16
THE GOSPEL: Luke 21:25-36

First Sunday of Advent
December 2, 2018

“Hope”

Sermon Preached by Pastor Lowell D. Nelson
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Grace, peace and hope be to you for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Thank you for being here to begin this Advent Season with this joy of the word hope. I always have loved Advent; my mom did a good job of giving me the little calendars that on each day as Advent progressed you could open up one. Did you ever have one of those? I never, ever cheated and went ahead of the day in which I was supposed to (congregation laughs), wait... that's not right. I still remember that, you just want to get to the punch line, right? Let's just get to it.

As pastors, we are trained to help you to linger a little bit, gosh, it's so hard, isn't it? When do Christmas songs start playing in the stores? Right around the Fourth of July, right? Somewhere in there. Because obviously it is a great commercial boon and people have all these ways of trying to entice us to spend money, but for us as people of faith, it is so utterly important to ground that God is with us, and that the birth of Christ or Christmas Day is the absolute good news that is pivotal to our life. But Advent is handling the tension that Jesus is coming again. All ready and not yet. But the not yet doesn't mean that it's not going to happen, it just means it is a matter of God coming into the world again as God has done, fulfilling promise after promise. It is this time that we live in. I call Advent the adventure, it's an adventure to be alive these days. In this orientation of life, I wanted to give encouragement to you, and to encourage myself and all people I care for to live in confidence for the Lord's coming. Already has been, already is, and will be to come is our understanding of time. God breaks into the world, so we have no doubt, we are people of hope.

As we speak in the next year and build our plans, and then 2020 begins. I am really looking forward to the Advent of our 50th anniversary in 2025. It is such a joy. I have worked with other congregations to celebrate the past in this regard of God's faithfulness, and to look upon God's love coming forth and breaking through again and again.

I have a simple Advent test for you. I am going to do it at an individual level. I am going to do it for the congregation, and I am going to do it for the greater church. An Advent question goes like this. Is the best still to come in your life, or has it already past? We don't have to have a show of hands, but I think we are struggling as a society. I think it's just well

understood that our children are going to do better than us. Isn't that one of the pivotal understandings, that we invest in our kids doing better than us? I don't think they have heard that. The economic distress, and a variety of issues is maybe they don't think it's going to be better for them. I just ask this question to you on an individual level, that I would love for it to be this way for you that the best is yet to come.

It has been marvelous that God's promise is made true for your life, but the best is yet to come because if that's not true, then we fall prey to cares and concerns, worries, and a variety of others. For this church – let's do a test. Are the best days behind us or are they ahead of us? Isn't this such a delightfully young congregation, 50 years, that's young isn't it? It is a young congregation; many have come from congregations that are well over 100 years old. To take into that understanding, that's the Advent hope that the best is yet to come, not because of our efforts, but because of God's promises being made true. Then for the Christian church as a whole, is the best yet to come? The answer is – with the promises of God intact and the glory of his word being made true, the best is yet to come. We are the people of hope. I would love for our congregation to be known as a hope center. That when people are part of this congregation, when they come to visit, when they attend Wednesday Night Alive, when they are part of the mission field, that they sense hope. What a marvelous opportunity for you and I to proclaim God's word.

It is a beautiful way of understanding the words that Gayle read, *the days are surely coming when the Lord will fulfill the promises made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The Lord is our righteousness, it is the Lord Jesus Christ.* This is a simple statement and it is so absolutely right on. Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus Christ and his righteousness. The Gospel text itself speaks of what happens when it's the environment or the systems that we have in place for our life when it is not the Lord and it is everything else that we depend upon, the stress and confusion amongst the nations and this understanding of using water as a roaring of the sea and the waves is another way to signify chaos. That things are falling apart. Sometimes you feel that way when you look and you see the systems, but here comes the Son of Man coming in great glory and I just love this.

Lutherans have a unique role, we are still valuable for this world, which is a Lutheran understanding, Luther said it this way. You remember how difficult it was 500 years ago, there are plagues, there are wars, he has a death threat against him, there are just a whole variety of civil unrest, the feudal system is being turned upside down, all these things are going on. Somebody said, "What if the end of the world comes tomorrow?" And he said, "I am going to plant a tree today." That's our understanding that that's not what we need to worry about, because we have the faithful one who keeps promises, we are just called to be faithful in our understanding.

This understanding that we are called to be hopeful and helpful that this understanding is built upon nothing less than Jesus, is simple as I say it here, but it is the most beautiful, profound truth that the world needs to hear. These words of understanding that the concerns of life, make sure that your hearts aren't weighed down with dissipation, such an interesting word. Dissipation – squandering that which you have, drunkenness in all its forms and the worries of this life. Be alert at all times.

I want to stress this to you, this word alert was also similar to the word in the book of Daniel, where he is lying awake and thinking. It is not a hyper sensitive state of worry. It is reflecting upon life, be alert, be aware, but be hopeful in your awareness of life. Sometimes the challenges of being hyper sensitive to the demands of the world, I think you know this, be prepared Boy Scouts, wonderful motto. Being prepared helps you with the uncertainties of weather and accidents, so you want to be prepared. Boy, have we taken it over the edge. Have you ever heard of the word preppers, where people are trying to eliminate every possible variable that could impact their life? I am not against having food, water, medications, safety plan, a way of working together, but I will tell you what – if there is a disaster in this community, this is going to be a place of hope. A place where we gather and invite people to come in. The only way to get rid of all risk of other people is some of the preppers, right, bury yourself in the ground, shoot anybody that comes on your property, that's not us. We are the people of hope, the church has always been incredibly creative when things are chaotic.

I spent years in the hospital systems and that word hospital sometimes I chuckle, remember hospitals are supposed to be based upon hospitality. Heck, most of us can't even figure out how to get around the hospital with all the confusion of the rooms and all that stuff, but it is that root and when people were concerned about the plague, it was the people of faith that actually stepped forward and provided care and in so doing, almost formed an inoculation, some were exposed to the disease and developed an immune response which allowed them to serve. That's us, we are the people that are creative. So I just wanted to encourage you in your own life, and certainly for the life of our congregation, we are a hope center. We are the ones, as we look at our future, say here is where things appear to be chaotic. We have a word of hope and tangible, practical, beautiful ways of helping and we lay awake and think about these issues, not out of nervousness but out of confidence that God's love is coming this way. This be prepared or be alert is not trying to remove all risk, it is being open to God's promises and the love that we have for our congregation and our community and this world.

I would like to encourage you now at this last part of the sermon is to be a person of hope. Our three kids are coming down next weekend. I had teased Tom that normally when they were a little bit younger, I would put them on a command performance. We called them the Von Trapp Family Singers and I would make them sing. But now that they are almost 30, that's not going to happen. You'll just have to say HI to them. Andrew, Jordan and Joe are coming in, we are going to spend time. I hope to be a person of hope. I hope to make it more,

not just a noun but a verb to articulate the hope and confidence that I have in God's love for them and for their future, and to certainly encourage them. I think that you have many opportunities from your generational leadership, cascade this down, to hear words of hope from, as we call ourselves, elders or seniors or people in the fourth quarter. Whatever it is that we call ourselves, the world needs to hear of our confidence that the best is yet to come because of God's promises that have been made and fulfilled and to come again.

It is said this way in 1 Peter 3, *always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you, to give the reason for the hope that you have.* We are called to be the people of hope and it is utterly intriguing to people why you and I would have hope for the future, and I ask you to prepare an answer. Yes, the theological answer is my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus Christ and his righteousness. But to encourage people to experience that for themselves. The time of evangelical zeal. The Advent season for me, this first emphasis on hope is so much more powerful than a wish. Remember Jiminy Cricket and Pinocchio in that movie so many years ago, him wishing on a star to Pinocchio. A wish is something that we project out into the world, we wish it would be different. But hope is the utter certainty that God is moving towards us. God is inbreaking into our world now, and that this worship experience that we have today soon to celebrate communion. Not in remembrance of what was, but God's inbreaking with, through and under the elements here, proclaim God's presence here right now.

Amen for that and for the encouragement for you and for I. So we are the people of hope. I encourage you to cascade that in your ministry sphere of influence, let's make that one of the core values of our church, to be a place of hope and let us boldly move into this Advent Season with hope and the love of Jesus Christ as our understanding. Stand up, raise your heads, your redemption is drawing near. Thank God. Amen